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# A study of the effects of process-oriented reading instruction and self-concept enhancement on reading achievement among community college students.

A. Cheryl Curtis

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A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF PROCESS-ORIENTED READING INSTRUCTION  
AND SELF-CONCEPT ENHANCEMENT ON READING ACHIEVEMENT  
AMONG COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Dissertation Presented

By

A. CHERYL CURTIS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

September 1982

Education



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To

My Parents, Nora and George Freeman,  
who instilled me with the desire to seek knowledge

and

My Husband, Tim,  
whose love, patience, and comfort helped keep the  
search in perspective

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## ABSTRACT

A Study of the Effects of Process-Oriented Reading Instruction  
and Self-Concept Enhancement on Reading Achievement  
Among Community College Students  
(September 1982)

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Directed by: Professor Judith W. Gourley

This study was concerned with selected community college readers' perceptions of reading and of themselves as readers and the relationships of those perceptions to reading ability. It also sought to examine the effects that process-oriented reading instruction had upon those perceptions. Fifteen students in a "Reading Efficiency" class were the subjects for the study. Students took a reading placement test, responded to an attitude survey regarding reading process and reading self-concept, and orally read two essays. Twelve of the fifteen volunteered for in-depth interviews. Pre- and post-assessment of the reading placement test, the attitude survey and the oral reading were performed. The t-test of significance was used to analyze the quantitative data. A content analysis, highlighting major emergent themes of the interviews, including perception of instruction, was conducted.

T-test results showed significant improvement in participants' attitudes about themselves as readers and in their attitudes about the

reading process ( $p < .05$ ). Miscue analysis showed that participants did not significantly improve their ability to process syntactic information but they did significantly improve their ability to process semantic information. Total comprehension loss also decreased significantly. There was no significant improvement on the Reading Placement Test.

The content analysis of the interviews supported and enriched the statistical findings. One particularly important theme from the interview data concerns the internalizations of the image of the 'good' or 'ideal' reader--an image gleaned from what appears to be valued in non-process instruction.

Research findings indicate that instruction and attitude of the classroom teacher are instrumental in fostering better self-concepts and in changing attitudes about the nature of the reading process. Interview data suggested that students felt empowered as a result of the process-reading instruction. Students felt they could better determine and understand important details of a particular text. They attributed this newfound ability and improved self-confidence to classroom instruction.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

For the past decade, the problem of adult literacy education in the United States has received increasing attention from educators and public officials. Increases in the statistics enumerating illiterates and functional illiterates in this country have dramatically highlighted the need for theoretically-based reading instruction at the adult level. Kirsch and Guthrie (1980) cite various estimates of illiteracy ranging from 1 percent to 20 percent of the United States population. Harris and Associates (1971) and Hunter and Harman (1979) quote figures in the 15 to 20 percent range. Actual numbers may vary from 10 to 30 million (Hall and Coley, 1975).

Historically, there have been various attempts to alleviate the problems of illiteracy. In Adult Literacy Education in the United States, Cook (1977) gives a by-decade scenario of many of the literacy programs and materials developed from the beginning of the 20th century to the present. Cook accuses the federal government of being concerned about the illiteracy problem only during times of national conflict (p. ix)--establishing what can be described as a "crisis" approach to literacy education. She cites the initial development of programs for native and foreign-born illiterates in the 1920s and the movement towards programs associated with "relief legislation" in the 1930s.



The social climate during the first half of the 20th century, dominated by the Depression and World War II, affected the development of literacy programs (Cook, 1977). With such an unfertile atmosphere in which to function, it is no wonder that attempts at development of literacy-based programs evolved slowly and sporadically. Though concern over the problem was evident earlier, serious attention to literacy research did not surface until the late sixties. Until that time, very few materials were being produced that were specifically designed for use with adults. While it was generally accepted and widely practiced that materials available for use with children could be adapted for adults (Cook, 1977, p. 75), little empirical evidence existed then or now to justify the practice (Kavale and Lindsey, 1977; Kidd, 1973; Kreitlow, 1972; Knowles, 1970, 1973; Long, 1980).

An immediate problem facing designers of literacy programs has been how to define literacy. Literacy definitions range from a very narrow and simply stated "the ability to write one's name" (Nafziger et al., 1976) to the very broad and verbose "one who has acquired the essential knowledge and skills in reading, writing, and computation required for effective functioning in society, and whose attainment in such skills makes it possible for him to develop new aptitudes and to participate actively in the life of his times" (U.S. Office of Education, cited by Nafziger et al., 1976, p. 20). These definitions and the ones that fall in between on the spectrum are based on the varying needs of individuals. Which one a researcher decides to accept is highly dependent on his populations' purposes and goals for reading and

writing. Such gaps in the extent of competencies warranted by the variety of definitions account for large differences in statistical reportings. While few people are unable to perform the signatory task, the statistics increase significantly when broader, more encompassing definitions are used as the standards of measurement. Though the statistics vary, one might agree with Hunter and Harman (1970), who conclude

that the aggregate message of all the statistics is more important than the specific accuracy. A much larger proportion of the U.S. population than had until recently been known or assumed suffers serious disadvantage because of limited educational attainment. In this country, persons with limited education are often the same persons who suffer from one or more of the other major social disadvantages--poverty, unemployment, racial or ethnic discrimination, social isolation. Inadequate education will probably be only one manifestation of their deprivation.  
(p. 56)

The latter part of the 20th century has seen a number of organizations join in the fight against illiteracy, each aimed at its own defined population. The Right-to-Read organization, as part of its national goal, sought to "eliminate functional illiteracy by 1980 among 90 percent of the population over 16 years" (Nafziger et al., 1976). Adult Basic Education programs have devoted themselves to "bringing their participants up to functional literacy" (Cortright and Brice, 1973) and to offering "adults aged sixteen years and over the opportunity to attain reading, writing and arithmetic skills up to the eighth grade level" (Weber, 1975). Short duration literacy programs in industry, the armed forces and penal institutions have been developed and implemented since the early 1950s (Ryan and Furlong, 1975; Sticht, Caylor, Kearn and

Fox, 1972). A grass-roots movement of the Brazil (Freire, 1968) and Cuba (Kozol, 1978) models has been proposed for this country (Kozol, 1980). These programs have had considerable shortcomings. Many are not research oriented or based on information generated by research on adult literacy. Right-to-Read has fallen far short of its goal for 1980. ABE programs are plagued by high dropout rates, inconsistent funding, the lack of quality instructional materials and an overall inability to attract a large number of students. In addition, few of its instructors or administrators have been trained in literacy or adult education (Basic Education and Reading Committee of the International Reading Association, 1980). And, unfortunately, the prospect of mounting a national literacy program, as Kozol (1980) has advocated, seems especially bleak in light of difficulties with funding, training volunteers, and political apathy (Greenfield, 1980; Farrell, 1980).

The problem of declining literacy skills affects not only out-of-school youths and older adults but also those in secondary and post-secondary institutions. Many colleges and universities have instituted developmental or tutorial-type reading programs and skills centers for those students who experience difficulty coping with college texts and reading loads. These types of programs are perhaps more prevalent in community and junior colleges which draw heavily from that population which Gross (1971) calls "new students." New students are those who in the past would not have considered college and who have, to a large extent, been failed by traditional pedagogy and systems of education.

The majority of these students are academically disadvantaged; they come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and have a history of academic failure. A common feature shared by new students is that the majority score in the bottom one-third on standardized tests of reading and math ability. New students seek out community colleges as an alternative to the traditional four-year college (Cross, 1971, p. 13).

Educators at community colleges and colleges with special programs for the academically disadvantaged are faced with ever-increasing demands, especially in the area of reading instruction. With the scarcity of preparation for and materials for reading instruction at this level, instructors are left with few empirical directives. The need for theoretical and empirical study in this area is clearly warranted.

### Purpose of the Study

This study sought to explore selected community college readers' perceptions of reading and of themselves as readers. Using multi-method data collection procedures, the researcher examined the effects of process-oriented instruction and self-concept enhancement on reading gains among community college students. Reading process instruction focuses on the integration of graphophonic, syntactic and semantic information as a means of making sense out of print. Rather than isolate one part of the information, instruction stresses the ways in which the three are supportive and how the reader interacts with each. The study assumed that many of the sample would fall into Cross's "new

student" category and would lack a background in reading instruction that focuses on reading as an integrative process.

Generally, the study asked the following questions:

1. Does the reading process orientation to reading instruction affect reading gains?
2. What effect does this method of instruction have on the semantic and syntactic processing abilities of the readers?
3. Is there a relationship between concept of self as reader and reading achievement?

### Rationale

The above view of the reading process is psycholinguistically-based and sees reading as a complex process that relies more on the reader's cognitive processing abilities than merely on the decoding of graphic symbols. Skills models of reading limit the total context of the reader's world and knowledge by focusing on parts--words, letters, sounds--rather than the total scope of reading. What readers bring with them to the act of reading--their ability to understand whole-language, how it works, and how it is used--is as important as what the author has written.

Given this theoretical focus of reading and employing self-concept activities which tap readers' metalinguistic abilities to examine their reading, the study attempted to examine the effects of process-oriented instruction on reading ability. Also, given the likelihood that the



students in this sample were characteristic of Cross's (1971) "new students," who had not had positive reading and learning experiences in school, the researcher wanted to investigate the effects of enhancing their reading self-concepts.

Thus, it was important to choose methods of research that would fit the intent of the study. A strictly experimental data collection procedure, while offering evidence of the effect of particular measures, would not adequately answer all of the researcher's questions. The gaps in the information required were best filled "by allowing a framework within which respondents (could) express their own understanding of their own terms" (Patton, 1980, p. 205). This allowed the researcher to interpret data from the perspectives of the subjects involved. Through ethnographic procedures of participant-observation and interviewing, the researcher was able to gain insights not afforded by a totally experimental design.

### Significance of the Study

There is limited data on the reading process of non-proficient adults. The literature suggests that there is a need to research how these adults attempt to make sense out of print. Non-proficient readers appear to have considerable difficulties processing syntactic and semantic information despite their receptive and expressive language sophistication. Empirical support of the effect of a particular type of reading instruction on a reader's syntactic and semantic processing abilities would be of special interest to educators and administrators in the

field of adult education, especially in the area of program and course development. In light of current trends in colleges toward adopting reading efficiency and developmental courses, the findings from this study should be especially useful.

Support of a relationship between subjects' concept of self as readers and reading achievement could be especially beneficial to teachers, publishers of instructional materials and others concerned with teaching reading to adults. If more educators are made aware of the diverse affective conditions adults bring to the reading process, they may be able to meet their students' needs effectively and promote successful learning experiences. In addition, information about students' perceptions of the reading process is valuable information to teachers planning reading instruction.

Also, the use of interviewing and classroom observation techniques may offer some guidelines to researchers who are interested in ethnographic methodologies in the field of reading. Quantitative measures are often inadequate tools for assessing reading abilities. Qualitative methodologies may, in fact, provide more insight into the processing strategies of readers.

#### Definition of Terms

The following terms are used frequently in this study. For purposes of clarity, the following definitions of these terms are offered:

Reading: A complex, psycholinguistic process in which the reader and writer interact. Both reader and writer

bring their concepts, language and experiences to the task. The reader's goal is to reconstruct the message the writer has intended.

Concept of Self as Reader (used interchangeably with Reading Self-Concept): The reader's self-report of his/her reading ability--not a global assessment of self, but the self in the situational context of reading.

Adult Reader: Any reader 16 years of age or older.

Miscue: Any response in oral reading that differs from the expected response.

Reading Process Instruction: A whole-language model of teaching that focusses on what happens during the course of learning to read and learning from reading.



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Concomitant to the already stated concerns about literacy education, the focus of this study is directed by research done in the field of psycholinguistics and reading, miscue analysis, adult learning and self-concept theory. In examining these issues, this review of the literature attempts to (1) clarify further this study's theoretical focus of the reading process; (2) synthesize miscue analysis research done with children and adults; (3) review adult learning theories; and (4) explore the relationship between self-concept and reading.

#### Psycholinguistics and Reading

Psycholinguistics has frequently been described as the marriage between the fields of cognitive psychology and linguistics. The resultant union seeks to understand and analyze the language and thinking process of humans. Rudell (1969) has suggested that studying "language skills learning is more powerful than either that of linguistics or psychology considered separately." When applied to reading, psycholinguistics attempts to explain the reading process. A psycholinguistic theory of reading implies that reading is a thought and language process--one in which readers function as competent users of language. They bring a priori experiences and cognitive development to the task. Psycholinguistic reading theory has its origins in the work of Chomsky (1965). His theory of transformational-generative grammar with its syntactic, semantic and phonological components is the basis for much of the

psycholinguistic theory of the reading process.

Within a psycholinguistic framework, the reading process is viewed as interaction between writer and reader. Both bring their own concepts, language and experiences to the act of reading. The writer's role is that of an encoder of meaning, the reader's that of decoder. The reader's goal is to reconstruct the message the writer has intended.

Prior to Chomsky, few researchers addressed the psycholinguistic nature of the reading process. One of the few, who is now receiving overdue attention and recognition for his foundational work in this area, is Edmund Burke Huey. As early as 1908 in The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading, Huey wrote of the need to analyze what we do when we read and of the dominant role that meaning (i.e., comprehension) plays in the reading process. These ideas were contrary to the prevalent theories that reading was the perception of isolable parts.

In recent years, a number of contemporary psycholinguists have supported and developed more fully many of Huey's hypotheses about reading and comprehension. Smith (1971, 1973, 1978), Goodman and Fleming (1969), Gibson and Levin (1975), and Kolars (1969) are a few of the prominent researchers who have formulated and compiled a significant body of studies on the nature of the reading process. Cooper and Petrosky (citing Smith, 1976, p. 186) point out three themes that interface in these researchers' findings:

1. Only a small part of the information necessary for reading comprehension comes from the printed page.

2. Comprehension can precede the identification of individual needs.

3. Fluent reading is not decoding to spoken language.

The core assumption of these three themes is that the proficient reader reads for meaning, not for the decoding of sub-parts. Unlike behavioristic theory, which advocates that meaning is "the linear sum of words in a sentence," the psycholinguistic view of meaning relies on the connection of "surface structure and deep structure with syntactical rules" (Cooper and Petrosky, 1976, p. 187). The grammar of sentences describes relationships between words. Because of this interaction, the reconstruction of meaning is possible.

Kolers (1969, 1970) and Smith (1971, 1973) have expanded theories about the information processing abilities of the brain and the eye. According to them, reading is only incidentally visual; it is the selective processing of the brain which reduces visual information to its distinctive features. Smith asserts that "non-visual information," including a "theory of the world in our heads," allows readers to make sense out of print efficiently. Prior knowledge (experience), syntactic cues and semantic cues guide us in predicting meaning and confirming or rejecting those predictions. This selective and sophisticated cognitive process ". . . involves the human brain's capacity to acquire and organize incoming information. . . . the brain directs the eye to look for information on the basis of (1) what is already stored in the brain, (2) the task at hand, and (3) the rules of categorization, and syntax by which the brain makes sense out of the world" (Cooper and Petrosky, 1976, p. 188).

### Miscue Analysis

A valuable tool that has been developed out of psycholinguistic research is miscue analysis. It allows an observer to examine the oral reading proficiencies of children and adults. A miscue is any oral response in reading which differs from the expected response. In miscue analysis, natural reading phenomena are observed. The study of oral reading miscues or "errors" is based on the assumption that reading is a thought and language process (i.e., psycholinguistic in nature) in which a reader utilizes language cues based on his/her experiences and interaction with print. Effectively utilizing these language cues aids comprehension and helps the reader make sense of print (Goodman, 1969; Goodman, 1973; Goodman and Burke, 1972). The value of psycholinguistics and the analysis of oral reading lies in the "insights (they) can provide into reading and the process of learning to read" (Smith and Goodman, 1971, p. 1977). What causes reading behaviors is a primary research concern. Through the miscue analysis techniques of examining and evaluating oral reading, an understanding of how miscues relate to expected responses is possible. These insights provide potentially valuable information for instruction. Miscue analysis shifts the focus from the negativity of error analysis to a viewpoint "in which both the reader and the reading process may be regarded positively. The reader . . . may be regarded as a competent user of language whose language competence is reflected in miscues produced as a proficient reader and at all stages of acquisition of reading proficiencies" (Goodman, 1976, p. 15).

Miscue analysis particularly attends to the pattern of miscues made throughout the reading of a text. The analysis evaluates the reader's miscues in three major areas: (1) the degree to which the reader's miscues produce semantically and syntactically acceptable sentences; (2) the degree of meaning change caused by the miscue; and (3) in word-for-word substitutions, the degree of graphic similarity between the word in the text and the word as rendered by the reader (Goodman and Burke, 1980). This evaluation determines which cue systems a reader is utilizing during the reading process.

Goodman (1970, p. 15) outlines the kinds of information, the different cue systems, used during the reading process:

#### I. Graphophonic Information

- A. Graphic Information (letters, spelling patterns, punctuation)
- B. Phonological (sounds, sound patterns, intonation)
- C. Phonic Information (the complex set of relationships between the graphic and phonological representations)

#### II. Syntactic Information

- A. Sentence Patterns
- B. Pattern Markers
  - 1. Function Words
  - 2. Inflections
  - 3. Punctuation - Intonation
- C. Transformational Rules

#### III. Semantic Information

- A. Experience (prior experience of reader)



- B. Concepts (reader's organization of meaning)
- C. Vocabulary (reader's ability to sort experience and concepts in relation to words and phrases in context of what s/he is reading)

Miscue analyses (children). In a review of the oral reading literature on miscue analyses done with children and adults, this researcher (Curtis, 1980) noted patterns of reading behaviors among children beginning to read and non-proficient adults attempting to process print. In the studies done with children (Barr, 1972, 1974-75; Biemiller, 1970; Cohen, 1974-75; DeLawter, 1975; Goodman, K., and Burke, 1973; Goodman, Y., 1971; and Weber, 1970a, 1970b), the following patterns were observed:

1. All readers attend to the graphic display (i.e., they survey the printed stimulus).
2. All readers are sensitive to the grammatical constraints of language and evidence that sensitivity when processing connected text.
3. In early stages, beginning readers have difficulty attending to graphic, syntactic and semantic cues at the same time, but developmentally these begin to integrate.
4. Reading behavior is influenced by prior reading instruction (i.e., students develop patterns for processing print congruent with methods of reading instruction).

5. All readers exhibit some degree of self-correction strategy.

The oral reading literature offers the following synthesized view of the nature of the reading process and behaviors that beginning readers exhibit when they attempt to process print. The task facing the beginning reader is a complex one of coordination and integration of various cues--graphic, syntactic and semantic. This integration procedure is not a spontaneous one; everything does not come together at once. The child comes to the task of reading with some notions of what reading is about and with some internalized, a priori concepts of linguistic structures. At this basic linguistic level, the child is "ready" to make sense out of reading, and relying on what s/he already knows about language, produces certain kinds of responses to print. Thus, early errors attempt to approximate oral/aural language and are largely contextually constrained.

Depending upon the method of instruction received, the child is taught to focus either on a word/meaning centered unit of processing text or on a letter centered/phoneme blending aspect. Errors tend to reflect strategies that develop from either a sight word or a phonics approach. The child juggles with coordinating the various cues--graphics, syntax, semantics--and is not immediately successful at integrating the three. Developmentally, the process becomes smoother, more so for the proficient reader.

Beginning readers also demonstrate some concern for producing meaningful structures through their self-correction strategies.

Structures that disrupt syntax and meaning receive more correction attention.

Miscue analyses (adults). There are few references in the literature on adult reading that take a detailed look at what the non-proficient adult reader does (or does not do) when s/he attempts to process print. The literature documents vast sociological and psychological differences between adults beginning to read and children involved in the same task. Adults, by virtue of their age, bring to the task a variety of experiences. Some of these experiences may work to the adults' advantage as they have the potential to operate from a broader knowledge base and to understand relationships that children cannot. Other experiences such as failing to master a task that most individuals master as children can have a devastating affect on self-concept and block the learning process (Grawe, 1978; Rigg and Taylor, 1979).

The literature on adult non-proficient readers lacks the breadth and depth of the studies done with children. Raisner (1978) is one of the few researchers who has examined the oral reading strategies of adults. Raisner's findings, consistent with the literature on children's behavior, indicated that the adult readers in her sample used all three cueing systems: graphophonic, syntactic and semantic. The adults in her sample used graphophonic information approximately as frequently as children and tended to rely more on graphics when tackling difficult material, as do children.

The area in which adults seemed to differ significantly from children is in the processing of syntactic and semantic information. In



the area of syntactic acceptability, Raisner's adults did not perform as well as children. She concludes that the "adult subjects in this sample did not appear to have a consistent sense of syntactic acceptability" and that they showed less proficiency in matching the grammatical function of the stimulus word than data reported on children's abilities (Raisner, 1978, p. 43).

Raisner, in addition, inferred that her subjects' problems with syntax accounted, in part, for their difficulties in processing semantic cues. The ability to get meaning from semantic cues directly relates to the ability to process syntactic cues. In Raisner's students, "the syntactic sense did not appear to be strong enough to exert the controlling influence" (p. 43). She concludes that the development of syntactic relationships is a "most central aspect of language"--one that appears to have been interrupted in an early stage of reading instruction of the non-proficient adult reader. As a group, her subjects "did not seem to be sensitive to syntactic patterns and the predictive cues which they can supply" (p. 46).

Goodman and Burke examined oral reading miscues of young adults (tenth grade low-proficiency readers) within a larger study on patterns of miscues in oral reading performance. They, too, found that syntactic acceptability was a problem, not within shorter structural units, but throughout entire sentences and longer passages (1973, p. 283). Goodman and Burke also noted that semantic acceptability of their readers' miscues "demonstrated their ability to achieve meaning and is minimal except within short units of structure. . . . Continuity of meaning is

frequently lost and correction is infrequent" (p. 282). This non-existence of correction is viewed by the researchers as a partial demonstration of the non-proficient reader's unconcern for both syntactic and semantic acceptability (p. 280).

Adults coming to the task of beginning reading bring with them a variety of experiences, including failure to have learned a process that most people learn as children. In light of adults' lengthier experience as expressive and receptive users of language, one would assume a difference in language "sophistication" between adults and children. We would expect adults to be more cognizant of the patterns of language and to be able to make the connections necessary for meaningful processing of print. Non-proficient adult readers, however, do not seem to be successful in tapping this rich language resource, as the research, limited though it may be, indicates integrating the use of syntactic and semantic information as the major roadblock for this particular population. Non-proficient adult readers, who are potentially capable of bringing more meaning to print because of their wider range of social and linguistic experience, are demonstrating minimal ability to do so. Non-proficient adults come to the reading process not with the readiness of a child to experience new learning, but with the residual effects of having already failed at beginning reading instruction and perhaps remedial reading instruction as well.

It is highly probable, therefore, that instruction, itself, contributes to reading failure. Traditionally, instructional models of teaching reading have been based on theoretical perspectives of the

reading process. It is generally recognized that theory can influence instruction implicitly and explicitly. This instruction can have direct effects on the strategies readers utilize during the process (Barr, 1974-75).

Calfee and Drum (1978) classify current theories of reading by three categories: (1) bottom-up (serial processing of information); (2) top-down (experiential processing of information); and (3) a combination of (1) and (2). They propose that most theories fall into the latter group. Williams (1973, p. 123), on the other hand, uses many categories for classifying reading theory: taxonomic, psychometric, psychological, linguistic and transactional. In examining differences in the models, Williams (p. 141) concludes that the "biggest and clearest distinction that has been made . . . is that between reading as a passive process, with the graphic input cueing directly and automatically the already learned and therefore instantly meaningful speech cues, and . . . reading as an active cognitive skill, involving complex strategies of information selection and processing."

Unfortunately, a large part of reading instruction falls into Williams' passive process category. Despite new theories of instruction, most children in this country learn to read "from a few widely distributed sets of instructional materials called basal reading series" (Chall, 1967, p. 183). Much of the instruction based on basal materials can be described as "sight-word." Sight-word or look-say instruction introduces a set of controlled vocabulary words that readers are taught to recognize "on sight." Instruction is meaning-centered but whole-word

oriented. In 1955, Flesch questioned the efficacy of sight-word instruction and proclaimed that "reading means getting meaning from certain combinations of letters" (Flesch, 1955, p. 2). This inspired a major trend in the use of phonics as the most desirable method of reading instruction. Despite popular mass appeal, Flesch's pronouncement received wide criticism in educational circles (Chall, 1967, citing Riedler, 1962).

The focus of both of these types of instruction is limited in definition and practice. By attending to either a word-centered or a phoneme-blending process, the interactive nature of the reading process is ignored. This interactive process is not only whole-word, but whole-language by nature, and it utilizes all of the cue systems, not just isolated pieces of them. Students who are taught to focus primarily on the skills and drills of phonics and word attack to the near exclusion of any whole-language contextual processing are handicapped when the former strategies fail them. Remedial instruction, which tends to offer heavier doses of phonics application and isolated drills, compounds the problem.

It is obvious that educators can no longer approach the task of teaching non-proficient adult readers with the same attitudes and in the same manner as teaching children. It is equally obvious that materials for adults need to be based on their strengths and weaknesses, and not just on adaptations of what is available for children. Adult orientations to learning are different and their experiences more varied. This is especially notable in the area of previous reading

instruction. Behaviors that the non-proficient adult reader exhibits during the reading process are not the same as those demonstrated by children. These are primary reasons why research in instructional practices and in the reading process of non-proficient adult readers need to be conducted.

### The Adult As Learner

A major impetus for this study grew out of the researcher's concern about attitudes and instructional practices regarding the adult learner. Particularly distressing was the widespread practice of using materials developed for use with children to teach reading to adults. Even in the 1960s when the production of literacy materials was on the rise, the tendency to adapt children's materials was strong. In a discussion of the materials that the sixties contributed to the field of adult literacy, Cook (1977) used these descriptions of specific programs: "The Basal Series Approach: Although none of the adult series produced are as sophisticated as those for children, the formats are similar. . . . The Multilevel Package Kit: This approach was originally designed for use with children, but the concept has been expanded to adult instructional materials" (p. 90).

The notion that adults can be treated as large children has been particularly disconcerting to a number of researchers. Kidd (1973) and Knowles (1970, 1973) have developed theories of teaching adults that view them as independent, self-directed individuals with a variety of experiences. They suggested that pedagogy, which had proven "generally



ineffective," was not what was needed, and looked to developing "a collection of significant basic assumptions about adults which clearly present important differences between adult and childhood orientation to learning" (Newton, 1977, p. 362). A call for "andragogically" based theories that considered the characteristics and style of the adult learner was made. Cass (n.d., p. 30) emphasizes this point:

There is very little research directed toward the learning processes of adults. Existing research studies relating to learning process have, for the most part, been directed toward the learning processes of children. Findings from these studies have been 'applied' to the learning of adults; thus, in many instances, compounding the erroneous assumption that there is little if any difference between the learning of children and that of adults . . . Admittedly, the laws of learning remain the same; the characteristics and steps in the learning process are very similar for both children and adults--but the differences are distinct and many in number.

Numerous researchers have contributed to the field of adult learning and the psychology of teaching adults (Houle, Lindeman, Lorge, McClusky and Thorndike). From the research spurred by their studies, it is possible to discern some of the major differences between adult learning and that of children:

1. Motivation: Adults are self-directed, goal-seeking learners. Because they are self-motivated, learning is potentially more purposeful (Kidd, 1973; Hall and Coley, 1975).
2. Experience: Adults are older, more mature and have more life experience to bring to a learning situation (Commission of Professors of Adult Education, 1961).

3. Learning Orientation: The adult orientation to learning is problem-centered (Knowles, 1970, p. 49). Adults also seek immediate benefits of learning. Learning is for the here and now--not for the "some day in the future."
4. Learning Self-Concept: The child's self-concept in the learning situation is one of dependency. His/her role as learner is defined as a passive receiver and storer of information which adults decide children should have (Knowles, 1970, p. 49). The adult's role is not that of a full-time learner. S/he is a self-directing, decision-maker who is more active in the selection of school learning experiences.

Teachers of adults must contend with all of these variables, as well as the fears and frustration of previous failure. Learning, based on these adults' prior experiences, becomes associated with pain. As Knowles (1970, p. 40) has suggested, "if these students are to be enticed back to systematic learning, the rewards of learning must be made so great that they outweigh the anticipated pain of learning." For this reason, instruction desperately needs to be based on students' strengths and must provide practical strategies for approaching the task of reading.

#### Self-Concept and Reading

The study of self has filled volumes as the works of James, Freud, Mead, Maslow, Allport, and Rogers can attest. Though there are

differences in theoretical perspectives and definitions among these contributors, Purkey (1970) observes these major characteristics in the theories of the concept of self: (1) that the self is organized and dynamic; (2) that to the experiencing individual the self is the center of his/her personal universe; (3) that everything is observed, interpreted and comprehended from this personal vantage point; and (4) that human motivation is a product of the universal striving to maintain, protect and enhance the self (p. 13). Purkey proposes that maintaining and enhancing the perceived self is the "single most important assumption of modern theories about the self" (p. 10). Many researchers are in agreement that individuals depend on significant others to help them develop beliefs and attitudes about self. Of the two forces which dictate self-concept, self-evaluation and evaluation by significant others, Quandt (1972) theorizes that influence from significant others (such as family or friends) seems to be greater. Much self-concept development takes place in the home during child rearing. Another major portion of belief and attitude development and reinforcement takes place in the classroom during the elementary years.

The literature on self-concept and learning has been reviewed by a number of investigators (Covington and Berry, 1976; Burns, 1979; LaBenne and Greene, 1969; Purkey, 1970; and Wylie, 1961). The majority of these researchers conclude that self-concept and educational performance are closely tied. Jones and Grieneeks (1970), in their study of college students, found that self-concept of ability is the best predictor of academic achievement--better, in fact, than tests of I.Q.



and aptitude. Wattenburg and Clifford (1964) also found that attitudes toward self were a better predictor of reading success than intelligence. In his review of data that looks at the relationship between the self and school success, how successful students view themselves and how unsuccessful students view themselves, Purkey (1970) finds that there is a strong reciprocal relationship between positive self-concept and scholastic failure. Though the literature is not clear about the precise causal direction, Purkey concludes that this data gives us "reason to assume that enhancing the self-concept is a vital influence on improving academic performance" (p. 27).

The issue of self-concept and its relation to reading and reading instruction has been minimally explored in the research literature. Athey (1976) suggests that this may be caused by the differences in prestige afforded research in the affective domain as compared to research on the cognitive and linguistic variables in reading. Despite the secondary status given to studies in the affective domain, Athey feels that these studies "deal with questions which must be answered before we can fully understand what is happening when we read" (p. 355).

Quandt (1972), in a discussion of the relationship between reading and self-concept, hypothesizes that "low self-concepts which lead to reading disabilities are caused either by the child's evaluation of his failure to read during his initial attempts or by the reaction of parents, peers and teachers prior to or during his attempts to learn reading" (p. 8). Students tend to counteract the negative appraisal in a number of ways, including disguising incompetency or withdrawing

effort. These threat-reducing attempts unconsciously reinforce poor self-concept. Holmze (1962) describes a spiraling pattern of poor self-concept interfering with reading disability resulting in even poorer self-concept.

Klimes (1977) studied self-concept patterns of inadequate and adequate adult readers and found that in her sample all categories of inadequate readers, except Blacks, showed significantly lower self-concepts than the norm. Simpson (1977) examined the relationship between attitudes toward reading and attitudes toward self as related to reading achievement among elementary students. She concludes that reading achievement is significantly influenced by attitudes toward self. Athey (1976), citing research done by a number of investigators (Athey and Holmes, 1969; Hallock, 1958; Lockhart, 1965; Lumpkin, 1959; Malmquist, 1958; Padelford, 1969; Seay, 1960; Stevens, 1971; Zimmermand and Allebrand, 1965), reports that the research literature suggests that good readers have more positive self-concepts than poor readers. "More specifically, feelings of adequacy and personal worth, self-confidence and self-reliance seem to emerge as important factors in the relationship with reading achievement" (p. 357). These studies, however, examined self-concept as a stable, pre-existing condition and did not research the possibility of improving readers' concept of their reading ability.

Within a larger study, Brookover et al. (1965) conducted three experiments which focused on the "hypothesis that levels of school learning may be modified by systematic changes in the self-concept of

the learner through interactions with others." Brookover's study attempted to enhance the self-evaluations and expectations of students by (1) enhancing the academic expectations and evaluations that parents hold of their children's ability; (2) introducing an "expert" who communicated directly to students information that enhanced their perception of their academic ability; and (3) creating a new significant other in the form of a counselor whose high academic expectations and evaluations might be internalized by the students. Of the three approaches, only the first produced significant changes in academic achievement and in students' self-perceptions. Brookover's study reemphasized the important role that parents play in the development of positive self-concepts. He did not, however, examine the role that the classroom teacher can play in the formulation and reinforcement of those concepts. By introducing outside "experts" and counselors, the study set up unestablished significant others, perhaps making the concern these individuals showed suspect and/or unimportant to the students.

Brookover's study confirms that it is possible to alter one's perception of self as a performer and to predict a positive change in performance. It is this researcher's opinion that it is possible to improve readers' concepts of their reading ability. This improvement, based on a process model of reading instruction, a model which emphasizes the strengths of the reader, is intrinsically supportive of positive self-concept building.

This review of the literature illustrates a number of the researcher's concerns in the area of teaching reading to adults. It addresses the need to approach teaching adults in a manner that recognizes and respects their adultness and their prior experiences. It also addresses the author's interest to further research the effects of self-concept and improving self-concept on the adult reader's ability to learn and achieve. This research interest and the interest in examining the effects of process reading instruction formed the basis of the study described in the following chapter.

# C H A P T E R    I I I

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

Chapter I presented a concern of the state-of-the-art of adult literacy education in the United States. A specific outgrowth of the concern about declining literacy skills focuses on the recent trend of many colleges and institutions in establishing developmental or tutorial-type reading programs and reading skills centers. These kinds of programs are prevalent in community and junior colleges. Chapter II included a review of the reading, adult learner and self-concept literature. It identified the need to approach teaching adults in a manner that recognizes and respects their adultness and prior experiences.

This chapter will describe the research conducted by the author with community college students during the summer of 1981. An overview of the study, the participants, the instruments used and the proposed analyses of the data are outlined.

### Overview of the Study

As previously stated, the purpose of the study was to explore selected community college readers' perceptions of reading and themselves as readers. The study examined, through participant observation and interviewing, the effect reading instruction and self-concept enhancement had on the reading ability of community college readers. The study utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods. There were several interconnecting assumptions of the proposed study. One assumption of the study was that a reading-process instructional focus



would improve readers' concept of themselves as readers by providing a reading model that builds on prior knowledge and experiences, and that emphasized the comprehension-centeredness of reading, rather than focusing on unmeaningful and disjointed skills activities. The study further assumed that this focus would direct students towards adopting a view of the reading process that valued comprehension over production.

Because prior miscues studies (Raisner, 1978; Goodman, 1973) had shown some difficulty on the part of adults in integrating syntactic and semantic information, the study postulated that instruction which emphasized the coordination of that information would, indeed, result in an increased ability to do so. Both qualitative and quantitative measures, miscue analyses and the Reading Placement Test, were used. The miscue analyses offered a more specific view of how students processed syntactic and semantic information, while the Reading Placement Test allowed the assumption to be tested within a standardized framework.

Overall, the study assumed that prior reading instruction and learning experiences had not adequately prepared the subjects to approach reading as a comprehension-based process. While this supposition had been grounded in the literature (Chall, 1967), there was a need to verify this with the participants themselves--to scrutinize what their reading experiences had been and what their current perceptions of reading were. With these assumptions and with the objectives of (1) providing a richer context for conducting further research in the area of adult reading instruction; (2) providing insights into semantic



and syntactic processing abilities of adults; and (3) exploring in depth the relationship between self-concept and reading, answers to the following research questions were sought:

1. Will a reading process orientation to reading instruction improve attitudes about concept of self as reader?
2. Will a reading process orientation to reading instruction improve attitudes about the reader's concept of the reading process?
3. Will a reading process orientation to reading improve teachers' abilities to process syntactic and semantic information?
4. Will a reading process orientation to reading improve reader performance on the Reading Placement Test?
5. What are the major patterns that evolve from the participants' discussions of themselves as readers and of the reading process?

#### Instrumentation and Data Collection

To answer these questions, the researcher was a participant-observer during the summer of 1981 in the class, "Reading Efficiency," offered at a local community college. As a fellow-graduate student and part-time co-worker, the researcher was familiar with the classroom instructor's instructional orientation. Prior to observing the course,

the researcher validated the method of instruction by administering a modified Theory of Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) developed and validated by Diane DeFord (1978) to the classroom instructor. The scale which determines theoretical orientation to reading instruction was modified by eliminating those items that pertained specifically to the teaching of reading to children. It differentiates teachers according to their theoretical orientation to reading instruction. DeFord has determined that these "different perspectives on theoretical orientation indicate that there are consistent beliefs within teacher groups, that the teacher's theoretical orientation does have an effect on student's belief system" (DeFord, Unpublished Dissertation Abstract). Ten items (5, 7, 9, 11, 16, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24) were eliminated from the original TORP. The classroom instructor in this study scored an 85 out of 90 on the modified scale, indicating a high, whole-language, reading process orientation to reading instruction.

Five instruments were used to collect data on the research questions.

The Adult Reading Survey. The Adult Reading Survey was an attitude scale dealing with readers' concept of themselves as readers and their concept of the reading process. The Adult Reading Survey was developed by the researcher and pilot tested with a population similar to the proposed study group (N=24). The initial instrument was revised to exclude open-ended questions and items dealing with their interest in reading college texts, newspapers and magazines. The test was also critiqued by three statistics experts and revised in accordance with their suggestions. Items 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 on the

survey addressed issues of reader self-concept and items 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 10 addressed reading process. The researcher explained that there were no right or wrong answers and that only honest opinions were sought. Participants in the study were asked to respond to the survey in the first and last week of the class. Items in the Adult Reading Survey are keyed in a positive direction, such that a high score is indicative of a better reading self-concept and a view of reading that is integrative and process oriented.

Adult Reading Interview. Interviews were developed by the researcher to elicit self-reports from participants of their early recollections of reading and reading instruction, and to assess participants' perceptions of the effects of reading instruction on their concepts of reading and their concepts of themselves as readers. Pilot tests from the Adult Reading Survey suggested that the interview questions were areas of concern for the pilot group but that the open-ended questions on the original survey failed to tap more than surface comments. The open-ended survey questions were abandoned in favor of a more qualitative research tool that would

produce descriptive data; people's own written or spoken words and observable behavior. . . . The subject of the study . . . is not reduced to an isolated variable or to an hypothesis, but is viewed instead as part of a whole. . . . Qualitative methods allow us to see them as they are developing their own definitions of the world . . . (and) enable us to explore concepts whose essence is lost in other research approaches. (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975, pp. 4-5)

An in-depth interview guide (see Appendix E) was developed and focused on issues discovered in the pilot test and from research issues

highlighted by the literature. Lofland (1974) describes the interview guide as a "flexible strategy of discovery." Therefore, it was important that the interview allow for the development of issues important to the participants as well as the researcher. The guide served as a checklist to allow for coverage of "predefined hypotheses" but was not a fixed schedule which precluded unanticipated responses (Merton, Fiske and Kendall, 1956; Patton, 1980).

Subjects were approached in the "Reading Efficiency" class. At the first class meeting, the researcher was introduced as a doctoral candidate doing dissertation research. She then explained her research interests, her role as an observer in the class and their roles as potential participants in the study. The researcher took great care to maintain the image of an objective observer rather than that of a teacher or a judgmental professional. There were isolated occasions when she was asked to spell or define a word, but she was never approached by the subjects as a reading "expert."

Twelve of the fifteen students in the class volunteered to be interviewed. First interviews began the second week of class and were completed by the middle of the fourth week. Second interviews began the sixth week of class and were completed a week after the last class. Interviews lasted approximately one and one-half to two hours each and were held at the college in an anteroom adjoining the meeting place for the "Reading Efficiency" class. Each interview was audiotaped and later transcribed. Typed copies of the interviews were placed in a file for each subject. Emergent themes from the interviews were identified and

relevant passages marked on the transcription. Themes were later coded by category (i.e., related to present or past instruction, self-concept, oral reading, etc.) and analyzed for content.

The Reading Placement Test (RPT). The Reading Placement Test is a reading comprehension test designed by the College Entrance Examination Board with the Educational Testing Service. The test is used by the site school for student placement in English and reading courses. The "Reading Efficiency" course is generally recommended by the college for those students who score below the 35th percentile on the Reading Placement Test. The course, however, attracted a number of students who were not planning to enroll in the college in the fall and who had not taken the RPT, but who felt that such a course would help improve their reading abilities. The RPT was administered to these students during the second week of class. The post-RPT was administered to all the subjects at the last class.

Miscue Analysis and Retelling. Miscue Analysis and Retelling is a qualitative and quantitative diagnosis of oral reading. During the third and final classes, students were given tape recorders and passages to read orally. Tapings took place in the anterooms adjoining the regular classroom. Participants indicated by pre-arranged signal to the researcher when they had completed the reading and were ready to retell the passage to the researcher. The first 25 miscues were coded and analyzed and retelling scores obtained. Passages were chosen from Time magazine essays. Two essays, "It's Time to Ban Handguns" (Time,



13 April 1981) by Lance Morrow and "On Leading the Cheers for No. 1" (Time, 8 June 1981) by Frank Trippett, were chosen. The researcher sought pieces that were timely, interesting, coherent and that one would expect community college adults to be able to read. Both were comparable in length (1042 vs. 1124 words) and in readability levels (10th grade [Fry Readability Formula]).

Self-Concept Enhancement Activities. Self-Concept Enhancement Activities were exercises developed by the researcher but administered by the classroom instructor to allow students the opportunity to assess their reading ability positively and to evaluate their reading instruction. Several times throughout the course students were given the opportunity to reflect on themselves and their reading ability. Students were asked to write two statements: one describing something they felt they did well, in general, and one describing what they felt they did well or were doing better with their reading. The former served two purposes. It provided a mindset and model for the latter task, while at the same time providing a private forum for self-evaluation and positive introspection.

### Sample

The sample for this study consisted of fifteen community college students who enrolled in the course "Reading Efficiency." Twelve of the subjects volunteered to be interviewed; all agreed to the other conditions of the data collection procedures. The community college, located in Western Massachusetts, draws heavily from working-class



populations in Hampden County with the majority of the students coming from the nearby communities of Holyoke, Chicopee, Springfield and Westfield. The study sought to examine the sample in a naturalistic setting and did not control for age, race, sex or socioeconomic background. The participants, ten females and five males, were all white and ranged in ages from seventeen to forty-six. Nine of the fifteen were recent high school graduates.

A rationale for the choice of this sample, as mentioned previously, was the classroom instructor's theoretical orientation to reading. In preliminary investigations, the researcher found that this particular teacher incorporated her beliefs about the reading process into class lectures and discussions. She assigned supplementary reading material that attempted to clarify the process of reading and she focused on tasks that were designed to get meaning from print. These criteria were important theoretical constructs under consideration by the researcher.

A second reason for choosing this sample is the researcher's desire to assess what can happen within the natural, "real-world" confines of a semester's instruction. Given the limited time constraints of regular class exposure to instruction, the search for practical methods that could be effective within that time frame was germane. Wilson (1977, p. 247) has noted that "if one wants to generalize research findings to the everyday world where most human events occur, the research must be conducted in settings similar to those that the researchers hope to generalize about."

### Analysis of Data

A content analysis of participants' self-reports from the interview data was compiled to answer the following questions:

1. Will a reading process orientation to reading instruction improve attitudes about concept of self as reader?
2. Will a reading process orientation to reading instruction improve attitudes about the reader's concept of the reading process?

In addition, pre- and post-scores from the attitude scale were analyzed. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated on both scores and the t-test of statistical significance applied to the difference. Since the researcher predicted positive changes, a one-tail test was used and a significance level of .05 established. Statistical analysis was completed using the Statistical Package for the Social Studies (Nie, Hall, Jenkins, Steinbrenner and Bent, 1975).

A miscue analysis of the participants' oral reading was conducted. The first twenty-five (25) miscues for each subject were coded and analyzed according to the procedures established by Goodman and Burke (1972). Participants who made less than twenty-five miscues were eliminated from the coding (N=5). Pre- and post-scores were obtained for semantic and syntactic processing. Questions seven and eight on the RMI, respectively, ask "Does the miscue occur in a sentence which is grammatically (i.e., syntactically) and semantically acceptable?" Raw scores reflect percentages of miscues that are acceptable. Again,

mean scores and standard deviations were calculated and a one-tailed t-test of significance applied to the difference. This data was used to answer the following question:

Will a reading process orientation to reading improve readers' abilities to process syntactic and semantic information?

In addition, t-tests were performed on miscue data concerning total comprehension loss and retelling scores.

Pre- and post-scores from the Reading Placement Test were also analyzed and t-tests performed. This data was used to answer the question:

Will a reading process orientation to reading improve reader performance on the Reading Placement Test?

A content analysis of the initial interview was conducted. All interviews were read two to three times. Major patterns were underscored and later taken from the original transcript and put into a separate notebook. Separate pages for different emergent themes were established. Comments which defined and illustrated the situation were written on the sheets with the interview citation noted. This analytic scheme was used to assess the data which was used to answer the final research question:

What are the major patterns that evolve from the participants' discussions of themselves as readers and of the reading process?

### Confidentiality of Data

The names of all participants in this study are confidential and pseudonyms are used when reporting comments of the interviewees. Only the researcher has access to interview materials.

### Limitations of the Study

The study was designed to examine process reading instruction in a naturalistic setting. Therefore, the sample is not randomized and size is dependent upon class enrollment. It will be difficult to make generalizations beyond the sample. Also, because of the volunteer status of the interviewees, generalizations are limited. The likelihood that volunteers differ from non-volunteers (e.g., more motivated, more daring [i.e., risk-takers]) must be considered.

Another possible limitation is the effect of intervening variables on the study's outcomes. Attitudes about reading and reader self-concept could be changed by factors outside of reading instruction. The interviewing process, however, elucidates this issue.

The methodology does not include an interviewee triangulation component and, thus, does not allow for feedback from the participants. It does, however, use a multi-method approach which examines the questions from multiple data sources, thus yielding a triangulation of methods.

Miscue passages in the study were chosen for comparability in length and readability but did not control for structural or linguistic differences. These differences, in actuality, may account for positive

and/or negative results in the miscue data rather than effects of reading instruction.

The study examines the immediate effects of process-reading instruction. Thus, it is not possible to generalize or to predict effects beyond the data collection period.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This chapter will present qualitative and quantitative analyses of data relating to participants' experiences as readers prior to and concurrent with taking the "Reading Efficiency" class. It will include selected descriptions of participants in the study and a description of classroom instruction. The descriptions are culled from participant-observation field notes, interviews with the participants and data analyzed from the survey, the Reading Placement Test and oral reading miscues. The analyses will be structured around the research questions.

#### Research Question No. 1:

Will a Reading Process Orientation to Reading Instruction  
Improve Attitudes About Concepts of Self as Reader?

Several pieces of the research data speak to this question:

(1) the interview data which asks the respondents to describe themselves as readers and to assess themselves as readers before and after the "Reading Efficiency" course; (2) the pre- and post-survey data which asks readers to rank their concepts of themselves as readers; and (3) self-concept activities which ask readers to positively assess their reading ability and to evaluate their reading instruction.

The interview data and reading self-concept. The interview data attempted to separate and focus on the reading self-concept as an entity of the whole self. However, the two were invariably linked.



Participants' recollections unfolded in ways that revealed and strongly stressed that the reading self did not develop in isolation, that it is inextricably a part of a variety of experiences that make up the total self. The respondents tried to describe themselves as readers, but in listening to and interpreting their comments, there was always the sense that their perceptions of the whole self impacted on their stories. It therefore seemed logical and necessary to place their reflections about reading within the broader context of their stories. What follows are the stories of six of the participants of the study. These six are chosen because they are representative of the range of experiences of all the participants. Though there are similarities that connect the participants' stories, each individual's experience and his/her response to that experience is unique. (Profiles of the remaining interviewees are included in Appendix B.)

Bob. Bob is a quiet, soft-spoken twenty-six year-old. In his interest inventory, he wrote that he does not like reading and that he only reads when he has to. He feels that good readers know the meaning of a lot of words and have them readily at hand for usage. Bob has experienced chronic problems with reading since second grade and has had uncomfortable interactions with teachers and peers. He says he was made to feel dumb and embarrassed about his problems with reading. His peers openly ridiculed him, and his teachers shunned him for oral reading activities. Bob recalls having problems with pronunciations and being sent to speech class. Though he did not perceive of himself as having a speech problem ("basically, I thought we all sounded the same.

Either we all had speech impediments or I was tone deaf."), he accepted the speech class as a welcome change from daily classroom experiences. He recalls that phonics were a frustrating experience for him. He just wanted to go on to the next word rather than attacking the same one over and over again.

At an early age, Bob learned to develop strategies that would help him cope with the difficulties that he had and the humiliations he faced. He first speaks of using strategies in the third and fourth grades. He participated in a library-sponsored program which required reading a certain number of books and doing book reports on them. Whoever completed the task was given free admittance into activities such as magic shows:

Like then, I don't think I really read them--all of them. I think I cheated a lot. You'd have to write a book report. And I cheated a lot. I would read like one or two pages, lose the whole concept of the book and everything else, and then just cheat and use the author's notes on the back. That always got me in. (I, p. 9)

Bob does not recall ever finishing any of the books. "If I didn't have to do it, I didn't do it."

Bob and his parents were given the impression by teachers that he would outgrow his reading problems. He says he did not, but "the way school systems are designed," it got to a point where "(reading) was no longer necessary."

Reading (did) not make a great demand on me. So you could really avoid it. Or you could go around it. (I, p. 11)

It became easy for him to hide the fact that he had reading difficulties. When asked if he would like to read, he would answer, "No."

Some teachers he would "psyche out" by:

. . . doing everything to be sure that you wouldn't be called on. Like some teachers, if you raised your hand like you wanted to read, they never called the people that raised their hands. They would always call someone else. So I'd always have my hand raised. I knew it was a way to avoid reading--to have your hand up. (I, p. 11)

Bob developed another strategy to help him cope with readings assigned outside of school:

I'd go over to a friend's house and say, 'Hey, did you read the assignment,' and then ask what it was about. That usually gave me enough information to answer any questions in case I was called on to answer questions. (I, p. 12)

In junior high school, he formed a study group. The group exchanged school assignments. Bob did very well in math-related subjects. In exchange for his knowledge about record keeping and bookkeeping, he would receive someone else's assignments on geography or social studies, subjects that required more reading and comprehension. Bob was never at a loss for strategies. "If there was a way around it, I found it."

Bob dropped out of school after tenth grade, but he did study on his own to receive his G.E.D. In the meantime, he bought reading self-help books, "How to Read in Ten Easy Steps or Seven Days to Better Reading-type thing." He claims that he has done more reading since he has been out of school than he did the whole time he was there. He felt that the books helped to some extent, but it was his individual efforts and interest that were the real impetus.

In his interest inventory, Bob wrote that "he does not feel that he is a good reader." In his first interview, he explained by saying that he felt he could do better as a reader. He wanted more speed and

more comprehension. He thought that since high school he had gained some speed and had therefore gained some comprehension. He did not think it was probable that it was working the other way around.

Bob made an interesting comment that illustrates that how he read directly reflected how he perceived himself as a reader and his general attitude in attempting to read.

Because of the way I was reading. Being the slow reader I was. I could read five pages, and by that time I would be bored--not bored with the book but bored with my reading. So I just put it away.

(Interviewer: I think it's interesting that you say you weren't bored by the reading.)

No. I wasn't bored by the book. I was bored by my reading, you know. I don't think there's a book out there, or that there's a book period, that would actually bore me. I mean I made it through Frank Smith.\* [laughs]  
(I, p. 24)

By the end of the "Reading Efficiency" class, Bob was feeling better about his reading. He was "more enthused in reading and actually looking for things to read." He felt that it was not necessary to look up every other word that he did not know, rather that it was more important to continue reading. He also felt that he was able to acquire more knowledge from his reading and to "acquire more input into what you're reading. Before I used to just read enough to skate me through. That's probably all it was. I think that's been modified. I'm no longer satisfied with enough to skate me through" (II, p. 9).

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\*Frank Smith's Reading Without Nonsense, a text required by the course.

Bob increased his reading activity. "Now, I'm taking three or four books a week out of the library. . . . I'm really feeling good about it. I mean, I have to be able to feel better than I did. I actually went out and picked up Shakespeare! Julius Caesar!" He goes on to describe how he now feels about his ability as a reader:

My ability as a reader, yes, I think there have been a lot of changes. I think I would say that my ability to read is greater than it was before I came to this course. I mean, simply because of the fact that you don't stop to look at words improves your ability. Also, I think my ability has improved because before I even start to read something, I have to decide what I'm going to read it for. You know what I mean. I have to decide if I'm going to read it for myself. If I'm going to read it for myself, then I go in there with a little bit more (pause), you know, not so fast. I just kind of like casually go through it. But if I'm reading it for, you know, like facts that I want, I first skim the whole article, then I'll go over and read the whole thing. I think that's improved my ability. (II, p. 17)

Bob would now rate himself as a fair reader, not a poor one:

I would have to rate myself as a fair reader. Probably if my rate of reading continues the way it is now, soon, well not soon but somewhere in the future, I could be able to say I'm a good reader. (II, p. 18)

Lawrence. Lawrence is nineteen-years-old and a recent high school graduate. He is soft-spoken and shy. He enrolled in the "Reading Efficiency" course on the recommendation of the college. Lawrence summed up all his reading experiences prior to coming to the course as boring. In his reading interest inventory, he describes himself as a so-so reader because reading bored him.

Lawrence describes himself as a "slow learner" who was tested before entering school for language and speech problems. He recalls



having tutors from very early in his elementary school through graduation from high school. He discusses his tutoring experiences:

Interviewer: Can you remember, from first grade to fifth grade? Can you remember any of the things that tutors would do with you to help you get over (your) problem, to help you to learn to speak and to read?

Lawrence: (pause) Well, I guess mostly books and having to read out loud. I used to pronounce the words.

Interviewer: How was reading out loud for you?

Lawrence: I don't like it.

Interviewer: Why don't you like it?

Lawrence: Slows me down.

Interviewer: In what ways?

Lawrence: I don't know. It just slows me down.

Interviewer: Can you describe that a little bit more for me? What do you do when you read out loud that slows you down?

Lawrence: (pause . . . breathes heavily) It just slows me down. That's it. I don't know.

Interviewer: Do you go faster when you don't have to read out loud?

Lawrence: Yeah.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Lawrence: I just look at the words, you know, in my mind, you know, I know which word. But saying them out loud, I get (to) saying them and my tongue gets dry.

Interviewer: Is that a problem you still have now?

Lawrence: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you had that problem throughout school?



Lawrence: Um (indicating "yes").

Interviewer: Did you ever talk to your tutors about what you saw was the problem?

Lawrence: Oh, I didn't see the problem. . . . My parents did.

Interviewer: What did your parents say?

Lawrence: I don't know. They know I had this problem before I knew I had it. I'm just a slow learner.

Interviewer: What's it like being a slow learner? I'm really . . . I'm trying very hard to understand what learning is like for you.

Lawrence: Well, I just, like, take one thing at a time. (I, pp. 7-8)

Lawrence recalls receiving a lot of assistance from his parents in his later studies, but he does not recall being read to at home before beginning school. Neither does he recall being deluged with printed materials in the home. "My parents used to get Life. But I never touched them. I would just look at the pictures, that was it. Reading don't interest me--even now" (I, p. 2). Lawrence says he was more interested in playing outside than reading and recalls kindergarten as being "fun" because his best friend was there and they could "horse around and all that." Lawrence, in fact, was more animated when he recalled activities of rowdyism than reading or general learning experiences.

Lawrence remembered seventh and eighth grades as a period when he started to "settle down, doing my work and all that." This seemed to coincide with a very positive teacher/tutor influence. The relationship was a supportive and encouraging one for Lawrence. Though he had

had a number of tutors throughout school, this particular tutor is the first one he specifically identifies by name. He explains why:

Oh, she's the one I really like. She's the one that really pulled me through. . . . Without her, I'd probably be still in the dumper or somewhere.

He does later mention other positive tutor help that he received in high school.

When asked about his ability as a reader, Lawrence responds:

Lawrence: Well, it's O.K. (laughs), you know, as long as I can read. That's the main point.

Interviewer: Do you think you are a good reader?

Lawrence: No, I know that for sure.

Interviewer: How do you know that for sure?

Lawrence: Oh, I know, listening to other people read and, you know, how they just flow right through; and me, it's da-da-da, da, da, da (imitating a stuttering-like sound). You know, sometimes I'd read a page and take a little break.

Interviewer: Why do you do that?

Lawrence: So I won't get tired. (laughs) And also to think about what I just read. (pause) So I can try to remember it. I don't have such a good memory either. . . . I forget real easy. (I, p. 19)

Lawrence did not feel that his ability to read had changed any as a result of taking the "Reading Efficiency" course. He felt the "same as before" taking the class. In his first interview, he mentioned that he liked the class and enjoyed listening (Lawrence never took part) to the exchange of ideas and the classroom discussion. It was not boring the way that high school was. He still contended, however, that reading

was boring, that he was "no reader" and that he did not like to read. He said that the class did not teach him anything about reading or about what it was. Nor did it give him any insight into his own reading.

Lawrence declares that he does not want to be a better reader. It is of no great importance to him right now. Maybe someday in the future it will be, but right now there are better, more enjoyable things to do than read. To him, being a reader only proved that he could read-- nothing more, nothing less.

Eva. A very attractive, petite, thirty-five year-old woman, born and schooled in Germany, Eva fit the German stereotype in a number of ways. She was controlled, reserved and strong-willed. She spoke her mind and was noted for taking unwaivering stances on issues during classroom discussions. She possessed a wry sense of humor and an appealing personality; underneath her calm and controlled exterior was a real warmth. Eva was a difficult person to interview because she was convinced that she had no information to offer that would shed any light on the reading process. She had detested school from an early age and had long since blocked most of her schooling experiences from her memory. Eva tries to explain why she had such negative feelings about school:

When I was a kid, I was very shy . . . like I wouldn't ask questions. I would feel dumb if I ever asked a question. And, of course, if you don't ask questions and if you have doubt in your mind, you certainly won't find the answer. (pause) I guess, maybe, that was why I disliked school. Maybe because I had to expose myself. I don't know if that's how I felt, but that's the only way I can explain it. (I, p. 9)

Eva says that school pressured her quite a bit. She lived in fear that she "was going to be called next," and she wasn't always sure that she was going to have the answer. She was asked if it was so terrible not to know the answer:

I think it was. (pause) See, this is what is great about this country, I think. (pause) Parents can tell their kids, 'You can ask questions and you can do well, if you want to do well. If you don't want to do well, that's your own problem.' But I think there (Germany) you just felt you had to perform. You had to know the answers instead of realizing that you're going there to learn. You thought that once you had an assignment and you read it you were supposed to know it. (pause) It's interesting. A lot of people I talk with feel . . . that I'm very intelligent. I don't feel that way. I know if I put my mind to it I can do a lot of things, but I don't feel that I ever felt I was ever intelligent in Germany. I know I'm not stupid. (pause) I think a teacher liking me was more important to me than learning.

(Interviewer: Why do you think you felt that way?)

I don't know. I don't know. (pause) It's not because my mother didn't love me or she didn't hug me or any of those things. (pause) There must have been reasons I'm not aware of myself. (pause) Maybe it's because, I don't know, maybe school. Maybe I dislike school so much because kids were not allowed to be kids--not just in school, but in general, I think. (I, p. 10)

Reading, by her recollections, became important in her life when she first came to the United States. Learning the language a little better and being able to help her small children with the language, as well as being able to read to them, were prime motivators. She began to read magazines and newspapers--"Reading for what was going on"--and later developed an interest in "literature and novels and things of that sort": poetry, Tolstoy, Dostoevski.

Eva now places a great deal of importance on being able to learn. She says she is a "person hungry for knowledge." She was plagued by the fact that she never graduated from high school. "I wanted to be able to write on (job) applications, you know, finished, got G.E.D. or whatever."

You wouldn't believe what a stepping stone it was for me to go and really take the G.E.D. and how important it was to me to do that. (I, p. 15)

Eva is confused by what really motivated her to get her G.E.D. and to pursue college course work:

I don't know. I just felt inside that I wasn't a whole person and I was sorry that I wasn't a whole person. That might be some kind of inferiority complex. But I still believe in order, and maybe it relates back to money again. I don't know what's more important to me at this point, you know. I can't make this distinction right now--if the money is more important or really getting the degree and being able to move up. There again, it scares me to think that I would move up on the ladder. I don't like to be confined in a social situation that I have to conform to other's expectations and completely lose myself as a person. But, there again, I would like to have a nice position--not so much as a power thing, but for money. (I, p. 15)

Money has always been important to Eva, even as a child. One of the other reasons that she gives for not liking school is that she wanted to have a job and make money.

Eva decided to take the "Reading Efficiency" course because she feels she "doesn't comprehend fast enough," and she wants "to be able to read faster." Eva describes herself as "just a reader":

Interviewer: Just a reader? What does that mean?

Eva: It means I can read most anything that I'm interested in, and I can comprehend a lot of it. I'm not saying I can comprehend all of it. And that's just about it.



Interviewer: And what's not good about that?

Eva: Well, that's good. It's just not good enough.

Interviewer: Oh? What would be good enough?

Eva: If I would have listened to my mother when she told me 'pay attention in school.'  
(laughs) I just don't read fast enough. And technical material . . . I just don't seem to absorb it. I would like to absorb more of it than I do, and I would like to learn how to take better notes so they help me in retaining what I read.

Eva goes on to explain why she feels she needs to read faster:

First of all, reading faster, covering the material, plus learning to eliminate what is unnecessary and concentrating on what is necessary. This way I can sift through, let things run off, things that are unnecessary and then I can retain more. That's, hopefully, what I can get a little bit out of this class. (I, pp. 14-15)

In her interest inventory, Eva also wrote that she would like to improve her reading by reading faster and comprehending better. This attitude did not change throughout the duration of the course. At the end of the course, she says, "What I really want is I want to read fast, comprehend and retain." The course did, however, offer some new insights:

Oh, for example, like if you read and you come to a word that is difficult, I just let it be. And also when I read, I do skip certain words that are not important to the text and so forth. (II, p. 2)

In addition, she felt that reading Frank Smith's Reading Without Nonsense, a required text for the course, was very helpful. "He's taught me to try to read it more efficiently. . . . It (the book) did give me very good pointers." Eva also felt that reading Smith gave her



insights into what was happening with her children:

. . . what mistakes they are making with kids today and what they teach them. And I realize, you know, a lot of times my little one would read to me and just make one mistake and, you know, (I) would have him go back and read it again. Never again will I make him go back. (II, p. 7)

Eva was asked if being in the course had changed her opinion of herself as a reader. She answered, "No, I have no opinion." When probed a little more, she responded:

I never had a bad opinion or never had a good opinion. I just read and how I'll be gaining more knowledge on what to do and what not to do. (II, p. 12)

When asked as part of her final exam what was the most important thing she had learned from the reading class, Eva wrote:

I learned to be comfortable with people and to express myself verbally and not to be too embarrassed. It was important for my self-confidence. I will be able to build on it.

Eva would not or could not say that her reading self-concept had changed, though she did feel that she was better equipped to handle printed material. However, she did feel that the course in toto had helped her feel more confident and had enhanced her overall self-concept.

Nora. Nora is a forty-six year-old, widowed telephone operator born of French-Canadian parents. During the first three sessions of class, Nora listened attentively and took notes religiously, preferring, by her own admission, to sit back and observe rather than jump right in. At her first miscue taping, Nora confessed that she did not consider herself a literate person. She later described her home environment as not being a particularly encouraging one for learning. Neither parent

showed much active interest in her educational pursuits. Nora was at first reluctant to talk about her early family life. "I have to reveal a lot of things about my family to you, and I really don't want to. Things weren't going well between my mother and father--so my mother was always on edge." Between the marital tensions in the household and the long hours her mother worked, Nora explained that her mother did not have much time. "She just had enough time to do what she had to do in her own life. And it's one of these things."

Nora recalls being "slow" in school and feeling educationally neglected in a large class of students. She had especially harsh memories of third grade. She developed a stuttering problem; something she feels may have resulted as a reaction to the tensions at home. She was held back in the third grade and described this as being a big crusher in her life. Subsequently, she was put in a special class where she blossomed. "They thought they'd give me special attention to find out what was wrong. I just needed individual attention because I did not get it at home because I had to grow up so fast." Eventually, Nora caught up with her original class ("they discovered that I was not as dumb as I appeared to be") and was skipped from fourth grade to fifth grade.

Nora was from time to time very concerned about her image as a reader, which she felt reflected on her overall intelligence. She discusses being unnerved by an oral reading task in eighth grade:

We knew everybody, and you didn't want to show them how stupid you were--but you didn't know how to read. Everybody knew you. And I knew everybody. I didn't want to show that I was that ignorant in reading, so I became nervous. I still get nervous when I read. (I, p. 8)

Nora felt that she had problems reading--that she could not read correctly or understand what she read. She also felt intimidated by the status of other students around her and the types of families to which they belonged. Nora was concerned with maintaining an image of smartness because as a person of "lower status," it served as an equalizer.

I was conscious of myself in many things. I was conscious-- I didn't want it to be--of people to know that I wasn't as smart as I appeared to be. Does that sound all right? Okay. I didn't want people to know that I wasn't that smart and everything. I wouldn't want people to laugh at me. (I, p. 9)

Nora gave the impression that she was still trying to prove something to others and to herself by enrolling in this "Reading Efficiency" course and other college courses:

I wasn't pushed, and I'm trying to push myself. I want to do something with my life. I want to do things--what I wanted to do years ago--but I felt, well, that wasn't necessary. And in order to do these things I have to do, I have to learn how to read. I don't know how to read well. I don't understand good at all. (I, p. 1)

She felt that her pursuit of knowledge and other goals were way-laid by marriage and child-rearing. "My goal is to go back to school. I want to do better--I want to get a better job. I just want to do better--better than what I am" (I, p. 15):

I feel as if I had other things in my life to take care of so I sort of fell back. Now that I want to go back and do things like I did before, I really can't. . . . I had commitments to make. I had a family to raise, children to take care of, a mother to take care of and a job. I want to go back to school. I want to have these goals. I just want to get back there, that's all. There you go. There you go. (II, p. 14)

In her interest inventory, Nora wrote that she would like to understand what she reads and read faster. However, in her interview, she stresses that speed is a minor concern. She had taken a speed reading course offered by the local night school and found it unsatisfactory:

I wanted to get out of it what I'm getting out of this (class), that's what I wanted. And I wasn't getting it. I was--that was just kind of speed reading. It was not geared to interpretation. I didn't want to learn how to read fast. I wanted to know what I was reading. And I knew, in time, my speed would increase because speed does increase after a while once you get into a habit. (I, p. 14)

In her first interview, Nora said she considered herself "a poor reader--very poor reader." She somehow blamed third grade, as though it provided a missing explanation for why she had problems understanding what she read:

(I am a poor reader) because I don't practice my reading, because it all stems back to third grade. Everything went back to third grade. (I, p. 15)

In the second interview, she felt her ability as a reader had changed:

It has changed. It has gotten better. It has improved. My attitude is better about reading. I feel as if I can handle the heavier material which she had given in class. I feel as if I can handle it--with understanding. (II, p. 11)

Though her ability has changed--her potential to be a better reader enhanced--she assessed herself as a reader cautiously:

Myself as a reader . . . not as good as I'd like to be. (pause) There it goes. (laughs) No, it's just that it's going to take more practice, that's all. And practice takes time, and in time I'll be better. It's a matter of practice and time. I have the basics and this is what I wanted to know. I know how to search for things. Before I didn't know how to search for things--in everything. And (I) like to know the shortcuts, the clues--everything

to make things understandable for me. And that's why I came here for. (II, p. 11)

Nora has placed a monumental importance on being a successful reader. It represents for her a stepping-stone toward real goals she had spoken of. She explains what reading means to her:

Reading to me is very important. It shows you how much knowledge you have and whether it's just plain--fictional, something educational like history, or anything that you want to get out of it. The way you talk tells how much you have read. Maybe my line of thinking is entirely different, but this is how I interpret reading. And knowledge comes out of that. . . . Why is it important to me? Because it goes with education. In order to get a further education, you have to know how to read. . . . Now, I wouldn't want to go cold turkey into a class and spend a hundred and some odd dollars on a course that I'm not going to get anything out of. I have to know how to read, so I've got to know how to interpret. And that is knowledge which I'm going to be learning. I think reading is very important. If you don't know how to read, forget it. . . . I want to have that satisfaction that I know something thoroughly. So that's why I want to learn how to read--learn how to read, have a little knowledge. I've got to get the knowledge. I'm going to school to get knowledge. O.K.? (So) that I can hold a conversation and show that I do have a little more intelligence than I do now. That's it. (II, p. 13)

Leslie. Leslie is a seventeen-year-old recent high school graduate who plans to enter the community college in the fall semester. Because she scored below the thirty-fifth percentile on the Reading Placement Test, the college recommended that she take the "Reading Efficiency" class. Leslie has an effusive personality that bubbles in spurts. She described her home environment and schooling experiences as positive. She always liked school and enjoyed "reading and learning about different things and everything."



Leslie had few problems with reading or learning throughout her school experiences. She is one of the few readers in the study who never felt uncomfortable with oral reading:

I didn't mind it because you just did it like everybody else, so it didn't really bother me. In a way, I thought it helped, too, because if you're reading to yourself, nobody is going to tell you how to pronounce a word or help you with the word if you don't know what it means or something like that. I enjoyed reading out loud. (I, p. 2)

Leslie recalls being placed somewhere in the middle in reading groups, not "the first one, for sure . . . (but) I don't think I was ever that far down." In general, she remembered reading throughout school as an enjoyable experience; and as a young girl, she enjoyed reading books in the Little House series and a number of other stories introduced in school.

When asked to describe herself as a reader, Leslie says:

Well, I think I'm just an average reader, I guess. I don't think I could read other things in ten minutes, if it's a long book or something, you know. My English teacher, she could read books in a certain amount of time. So, I'm just an average reader, and I enjoy reading the (news)paper and everything and some books outside of school. Not like a lot but like if a book interests me, I'll read that--especially during the summer. You find it hard to sit down and read a book because there's so many things to do (normally). But during the summer, you try to read like at least two books, you know. I'm just an average reader. (I, p. 11)

Leslie gives her impression of a good reader--an image akin to a "super reader," able to tackle all reading tasks effortlessly:



A good reader probably wouldn't have to write down certain things.\* They probably could remember everything. They probably could read things faster and understand it more. (I, p. 11)

When asked in an interest inventory what she would like to do better as a reader, Leslie responded, "Read faster and comprehend faster." In the interview, Leslie was asked if she thought that reading fast was a part of being a good reader:

Not really . . . your good readers could just read at a regular pace. I guess it would help if you could read faster and you wouldn't have to spend so much time reading one book. You could go on to another one. No, I don't think to be a good reader you have to read fast. As long as you understand what you're reading more or less, you know, you're a good reader. (I, p. 11)

Leslie waivers back and forth trying to resolve the inner contradiction of whether or not she needs to read faster. When she considers it closer, she thinks that maybe it is not necessary; but she does not seem to have really convinced herself. In the second interview, she appears to have arrived at some resolution:

In the beginning, I thought it was how fast you read. But it's really if you understand what you are reading. It doesn't make a difference on how long it takes you, but as long as you understand it. . . . To read is really to understand, you know. Whatever you read, you'll get something out of it--for yourself, you know. It's one thing to read it over really fast, you know, and not get it. But to read it so that you can comprehend it is the most important thing to be a good reader. I think I've changed my views. (II, p. 13)

Leslie had mentioned in the first interview that she had test-taking anxieties and that that may have been one of the reasons she did

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\*Leslie described herself as a note-taker from early on in her school career.

not do well on the Reading Placement Test. When asked if her ability as a reader had changed as a result of the course, Leslie responded first in terms of the test:

I don't know if it will help me for taking that test, but it will help you for college cause it helps you how to take notes and that's important. (But) I don't think it's the same as taking the test. I don't know if I'll do the same or worse, but I think I'll take notes. But I won't take as many and I won't look at the print as much as I used to. I won't stare at it. I'll just keep on reading it; and if I don't understand it, I'll keep on going and see what's happening. I don't know. I just wonder if I'll keep doing the same, you know, cause, you know, just taking it you'd think you would do better. I just don't think they should have everything on that, because it's a lot different than taking notes in college, like for an English course or any course. (II, p. 10)

Leslie questions whether or not one can equate doing better on a standardized test and feeling confident about being able to cope with college reading loads. "You have to understand it (the test) before you read that stuff." While she feels that the course will be beneficial in coping with the realities of the classroom, she is not sure that it will help within the constraints and artificiality of standardized testing.

Craig. An eighteen-year-old recent high school graduate, Craig displayed a garrulous and engaging personality. Of all the respondents, his recollections were the most vivid, interspersed with the most circuitous asides but always relating to the points he made.

Craig received much encouragement at home for reading, not only from his parents but from his older brothers and sisters as well. He had especially detailed memories of his sister, who "used to always

practice being a teacher," teaching him how to read and compute before kindergarten.

He described his home environment as being rich in print. His father was a lawyer and his mother was an English teacher. Both read to him when they could and bought books for him. He also recalled receiving books from relatives as gifts.

Craig was quick to point out things he did not like about his early reading instruction. He particularly recalls disliking oral reading from as early as first grade:

In first grade I had to read, and they make you read aloud. For me that was terror, sheer terror because I had a bad stuttering problem. I couldn't say one word without st- st- stuttering. It was horrible. Kids would laugh at me. I'd get in fights because of it. (I, p. 3)

Like Bob, Craig also had to attend special speech classes. Craig accepted the class as a challenge and fought through his stuttering:

. . . maybe just to show the kids that I could do it. Reading aloud--that's where my deficiency was, and I had to prove to them that I was going to do it and that nothing they did to me was going to stop me from reading. . . . I read it over, read it over twice, so I wouldn't screw up. I lost the whole meaning of the story. I went through my whole fifth grade reading book not knowing what a story was because we read almost every story aloud and I just had to prepare for the paragraph that was coming up to me. (I, p. 3, 9)

Craig asserts repeatedly that he is not a "big reader," but he lists a huge variety of materials that he has read. He says he never did much reading outside of what was required for school, but then recites a litany of his interests and reading: sports biographies, newspapers, twenty books in the Hardy Boys series, almanacs, encyclopedias, and the "best book I ever read, Catcher in the Rye."

Craig's ideal reader, like Leslie's, is cast in a "super" image-- someone who "every week has a different book, or every three days has a different book. Reading is the quantity . . . not as much the quality."

Craig describes himself as a reader:

I don't think I read as well as I should. I don't read that well. I pick up certain things but at times I won't pick up key things. I don't consider myself a good reader. I consider myself an average reader. Other people . . . might think that I'm a good reader. But, personally, I don't think I'm a good reader.

(Interviewer: What does a good reader do that you don't feel that you do?)

Speed. The speed in which one reads. I read pitifully slow. . . . And I just can't read fast, and I can't absorb enough. (I, p. 13)

Craig decided to take the "Reading Efficiency" course because he thought it might increase his speed:

I expected to be able to improve my skills eight hundred and fifty percent, but I haven't done that. When I entered the course, I thought reading efficiently meant speed reading. At that time, I was reading three hundred and fifty words per minute, and I was expecting to read quicker and obtain more. (II, p. 1)

He also wanted to sharpen his argumentative skills. "This class is not really encouraging me to read so I can argue, because I can B.S. my way through half the stuff if I really wanted to."

Though the class did not meet his expectations in those areas, it did have an impact on him in another. In the second interview, Craig reversed his position on reading:

Interviewer: Has this course changed your feelings about what reading is?

Craig: Yes, it has. I think reading is enjoying what you learn. I think reading is not swallowing down stuff. It's not quantity knowledge. It's quality--what you get out of it.

Interviewer: (somewhat surprised) I notice you're looking at this shocked look on my face. Where does this come from?

Craig: I've been watching my sister, \_\_\_\_\_. She's a big Harlequin Romance reader. When I watch T.V. with her, she'll come up with cute little phrases that she read in a book, but she just doesn't understand things well. No matter how much she reads, she doesn't retain the little things--things I'm just starting to pick up. Reading gobs doesn't mean a lot. It's being able to remember things and use them properly that's important. So, that's how my viewpoint has changed. Reading is quality not quantity. What you get out of reading should be used, not just cute. . . . To be a reader, it's not just to have the ability to read. It's the ability to use what you've read. (II, p. 9, 11)

Craig's image of himself as a reader does not change. He has difficulty talking of the quality of his reading as anything but average. He does, however, shed some light on his meaning of average:

Interviewer: You have a hard time telling me what you do that's good when you read, which is odd for you--you're a successful reader. Why is it hard for you to conquer that?

Craig: It could be one's definition of average--your definition of average and my definition of average. Your average could be from a North Carolina sharecropper's farm background. Maybe I come from a family where everyone reads and writes, and for me, average is what I'm doing now. Maybe for you, my averages could be above average.

Interviewer: So in comparison to your family you do average?



Craig: Yes.

Interviewer: What about in comparison to where you went to school?

Craig: Above average.

Interviewer: What about in comparison with the people in the class?

Craig: See, I don't know these people well enough to understand (pause), but from who I've talked to, I guess above average. (II, p. 11)

Discussion. The issue of changes in attitudes about concept of self as reader from the interview data is not definitive but is indicative of a positive trend. Five of the twelve respondents said that their concept of themselves as readers was better. They felt better equipped to cope with difficult reading materials and to understand more of what they read. Five of the remaining seven respondents felt that they were somewhere in the middle. They were reluctant to say that they had improved much as readers, but felt that they were reading and comprehending more. Of these ten, eight expressed a feeling of empowerment, an increased ability to comprehend. This was noted in such comments as: "I now know what to look for when I read," "I know what to go in there after," and "I feel I can sift through the unimportant details." Perhaps the most poignant testimony to this came from Bob. When asked what was the most important thing he had learned about reading, Bob wrote:

. . . The list is endless of the things I have gotten out of this course. So I have only listed two things. But I know that everything that I have received out of this class



will help me in many areas and not to mention in many ways. And all I can say is 'thank you' many times over. You have made me believe in myself again. Thank you.

The remaining two readers felt that their abilities as readers had remained unchanged. They did feel, however, that they had learned how to take better notes.

Self-concept activities. Woven into the fabric of the course was an effort to enhance reading self-concept by allowing time for students to assess positive aspects of their reading behavior. Underlying the self-concept activities was a belief that readers are rarely asked to assess what is good about their reading behavior and that most assessment tends to dwell on the negative, i.e., perceived inabilities or deficiencies. The classroom observation of this activity was difficult to interpret, but some students visibly struggled with the task--finding the most unease with the first half of the task. In the second interview, participants in the study responded to their impression of the exercise:

I didn't know what to put down (laughs). . . . I don't know; I don't like writing about myself. . . . It just makes you feel conceited or something. . . . I just don't like writing about myself. You may think you do something good then someone else says, 'Oh, you don't do that very well.' I don't like to say what I do well and what I don't do well. I don't know; it just bothers me.  
(Christine, II, p. 9)

I think that's very good to put down how you feel, because a lot of people don't express themselves very well until they put it on a piece of paper and they go back and you realize, 'Oh, my God!' I think it's a great idea. . . . I liked the idea. (Nora, II, p. 9)

Nora enjoyed the activity most as a writing exercise. She, too, expressed Christine's hesitance about being complimentary to herself:

I'm not the type that likes to pat myself on the back.  
(pause) I'm just not that kind of person. I don't pat myself on the back. I'll give other people compliments and praise them and how well (they're) doing--you did a great job. I'm that type of person. But I'm not the type to boast. I can't praise myself. . . . I just can't do it. . . . I can't say, 'Hey, I'm great.' (Nora, II, p. 9)

Peggy also felt chagrined, though she felt there were merits to the exercise:

I was almost embarrassed by that (being asked to do the exercise). You sit there and you sometimes rack your brain. 'Well, what is it that I feel I'm good at,' and other times, you know, 'Maybe I have too many things. Maybe I'm being egotistical' or something like that.  
(pause) Not that I don't think it's a good exercise on the whole. (pause) But it's not anything that I'm used to doing. (II, p. 11)

Lawrence said that he just felt "weird" doing it.

Two readers were more enthusiastic about the exercise:

I loved it. I did it in three minutes and then I looked around the table and saw the other people trying to think, and God, it came right off the top of my head. There was no question. I just quickly wrote it down and that's how I felt. I thought it was a great thing to do, but I did feel that other people had trouble with it. I think they had more trouble thinking about what they liked about themselves, and my feeling was well, 'They're not old enough yet.' There's something to be said for being over forty. (laughs) (Delores, II, p. 12)

Oh, it's a great ego booster. It really is. I think we all need our egos boosted occasionally. (Bob, II, p. 15)

Discussion. An initial assumption of the study was that teacher attitude combined with the self-concept activities would enhance the self-confidence of the participants in the study. While some participants felt the self-concept activities were worthwhile, most expressed

some reluctance and unease in completing the task. The more important and more positive effect on self-confidence was observed in relation to teacher attitude and interaction with the participants. Fifty percent of the participants (Bob, Eva, Leslie, Peggy, Nora and Delores) mentioned that the class and the instructor had inspired increased self-confidence. Delores' comments are illustrative of the group's feelings:

Interviewer: Has this course changed the way you feel about your ability as a reader?

Delores: Yep. It's the confidence again--the fact that I know what I'm looking for and am not afraid to speak up.

Interviewer: What has it been about the class that has given you this kind of confidence?

Delores: \_\_\_\_\_ and her attitude. I think she feels anybody who comes into this class, she has a regard--a high regard for them. She feels that they have a lot of intelligence. The only opinion she has about you without knowing you is, well, you're an intelligent human being, and I have this to offer you and you'll be able to grasp it. That was my first impression of her. She was confident that she could relate these messages to us and she believed that we would pick them up. (Delores, II, p. 13)

Survey data. Participants received a pre- and post-score on the "Adult Reading Survey" for reading self-concept. Group means and standard deviations for both the pre-test and post-test were calculated, and the t-test of significance applied to the difference. (Table 1 displays all statistical results.) On the pre-test, with a possible score of 45 for reading self-concept, participants' scores ranged from

TABLE 1  
SUMMARY RESULTS OF T-TESTS

	Mean		Standard Deviation		T-Value
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	
Reading Self-Concept	26.2	29.4	3.9	4.7	2.99*
Reading Process	18.1	20.6	3.1	4.2	2.04*
Syntactic Processing	85.2	86.8	8.8	11.1	.38
Semantic Processing	40.0	46.6	14.6	12.0	2.21*
Comprehension Loss	60.0	48.6	20.5	17.6	-2.64*
Retelling	53.4	49.4	22.9	15.2	- .89
Reading Placement Test (percentile scores)	42.8	47.2	26.0	25.9	.98

\*P < .05

21 to 34. The mean was 26.2 with a standard deviation of 3.9. On the post-test, scores ranged from 21 to 36, with a mean of 29.4. The t-value for the difference between the pre- and post-test scores was 2.99, which proved to be significant at the .05 level ( $p=.005$ ).

Research Question No. 2:  
Will a Reading Process Orientation to Reading Instruction  
Improve Attitudes About the Reader's Concept of  
the Reading Process?

To examine this question, observations of classroom instruction, interview data, and pre- and post-survey data were analyzed.

Classroom instruction and the reading process. Classroom instruction was an integral variable for the study as reading process orientation was central to the theoretical basis for the study. The course, entitled "Reading Efficiency," was taught as a summer 1981 offering at a local community college. Stated goals of the course were to help develop and improve ability to comprehend a variety of printed materials and to remember those materials for easy and efficient recall. The course was graded on a Pass/Fail basis. The class format was "conference" style, a combination of lecture and discussion with emphasis on the latter.

Materials for the course were compiled by the instructor and comprised of a variety of reprinted magazine and other articles from the natural and social sciences and materials from literary sources. In addition, students were required to read Reading Without Nonsense, a theoretical and practical treatise on the reading process, by Frank Smith.



Notetaking was an overarching construct for classroom activities. Most of the assignments were structured around developing efficient notetaking strategies as an aid to comprehension. Examples of reading assignments and notetaking strategies that occurred throughout the class follow:

- For their first class assignment, students were asked to examine the article entitled "Food, Fads and Fallacies," a piece on dieting and misconceptions about nutrition. Before reading it, they were to write down all the things they knew about diets and dieting. Students were then to read the article and take notes on it. The instructor described the assignment as a way to "analyze how students use notetaking as a comprehension strategy" and to illustrate how prior knowledge may facilitate one's understanding of a particular reading.
- To help students develop strategies for reading materials that are not of particular interest to the reader, students were asked to read "Firefly Magic." They were instructed to first read the title (and subtitles) and the first and last paragraphs to get a focus, a frame of reference. After reading each part, the class discussed their impressions of what the article might be about and what kinds of information they were likely to get from the article. The class



then read and discussed the main points of the article.

- Students were asked before reading the article "Everybody Loves an Octopus" to discuss their prior knowledge of the subject, answering questions such as "What do you think of when you think about octopus? What do you already know about octopus?" After the discussion, the instructor explained that using these kinds of strategies help to form a mindset. The reading of this article, she explained, was an exercise in focusing on and determining what experiences or what information was going to be contained in the article. Borrowing a phrase from Frank Smith, the instructor described it as establishing "pegs to hang information on."\*
- The instructor briefly followed up on the issue of mindset in a later lecture on "chunking" information, explaining how organization is needed to affect long-term memory. She gave the example by having students recall a string of numbers, then letters that she had recited orally. The students had difficulty recalling more than a few in succession and perhaps a few

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\*During this particular exercise, students started to respond to some of the theoretical points being made and commented on reading for different purposes and changing one's attitude depending on what one is reading.

isolated ones. She explained how these strings had meaning for her: her phone number, date of birth, and social security number and a Russian sentence. They were easy for her to recall because they were already organized for her. Yet, they were difficult for the class because they were not able to organize the information in ways that were equally meaningful to them.

- The class was asked to read "Thar She Grows," an article on the discovery and uses of the oil in the jojoba plant. Three groups were determined and a specific group is assigned to take notes from either a sociologist, an economical or a chemical perspective. The assignment illustrated that there are different kinds of information to be organized in some articles depending upon one's purpose for reading-- what one "goes in after."

Throughout the class, the instructor gave evidence of her concern with the reading process and that orientation to the teaching of reading. This concern was demonstrated in the purpose of some of the assignments already cited. She showed that concern in other classroom activities:

- She assigned the reading of Frank Smith's Reading Without Nonsense, explaining that the book is written for teachers but that the information contained in

the book about the reading process would help the class. She discussed some of Smith's ideas about misconceptions of what the reading process is supposed to be, emphasizing that people who are concerned with speed reading and mechanical manipulations of print are overly involved with the mechanics of reading production and suggests that a more practical way of approaching the task of reading is by being more attentive to meaning.

- The instructor shared with the class an article written by Bruno Bettelheim that had appeared in a recent Psychology Today. The Bettelheim article raised pertinent issues about the teaching of reading to children, including the lack of reality in basal materials and the generally unstimulating atmosphere in classrooms. The reading of the article sparked a lively classroom discussion covering some of the participants' experiences and their children's experiences with learning to read.
- In a discussion of textbook materials, the instructor noted that some texts, even introductory ones, have a presupposition about the knowledge a person brings to the reading. It, oftentimes, introduces new vocabulary in an area unknown to the reader. She recommended seeking new sources for background

information, suggesting that one's personal knowledge should determine the sophistication of sources used as references.

- To make an analogy with the issue of point of view, the instructor asked the class to make two drawings of another classmate, each from different vantage points. Noting differences in what the "artist" sees when standing or sitting, she related the differences to the reading and writing processes. Sometimes the reader may want to see the author's point of view; other times s/he may want to ignore it or specifically search for a particular aspect.

In the second interview, participants assessed their overall impressions of the course and the instruction. Many respondents felt the course had overwhelming benefits:

I loved every minute of it. She's a great teacher. Three hours is not sufficient. . . . The material she gave us wasn't easy material. It's hard material, and I think this is what we all needed. . . . We needed something (where) we'd need to think. Cause (in) the classes from now on we won't get her moral support. We won't get her understanding.

\* \* \* \* \*

I understand how to search for things. I find it easier, and I was really amazed. I didn't think I would handle it very well, but I did. I got something out of it. . . . I'm pleased with myself. When you're pleased with yourself, you learn with a happy feeling. You know, 'Hey, I got it.' I haven't lost my aptitude in learning. I understood better. Before I read something and I read too slow. It's fine when I read something like a happy story, love story or something like that. But when you've got to learn or try to learn for information, that's a different type of learning and you've got to learn to read faster.

And this is what I was trying to search. I want to make sure when I go into an English class, or a math class, or a history class, whatever, that I can handle it--that I was reassured that I would handle it. And I can, because I went to this class to give me confidence. And it gave me confidence. (Nora, II, pp. 1-3)

I think this course has done a lot for me, not only for the fact that I feel better. I think I've gained a lot of confidence. I'm not afraid to ask a question, and I feel as though I'm better prepared because of the way \_\_\_\_\_ has presented the material. . . . As far as reading to study, I feel that I could do that now, which I didn't think I could do before. I think I could pick out information that I didn't even know how to pick out before. As far as reading for pleasure, I think it's made a big difference in my reading. I no longer feel as though if I read something and don't understand it, I don't have to go back and keep reading it again, because it's going to come to me as I keep reading. . . . I think that I comprehend more. (Delores, II, p. 1)

I liked the class. It was really good. But some of the readings were hard. Like, when she said to take notes, it really got involved. But I think it helped me because when I go to read now I know what to look for. So I liked it. (Christine, II, p. 1)

It's been a good experience. . . . I found on the whole that it was very interesting. . . . It didn't strike me as a typical course. Like a small little social group . . . you were free to express yourself, whenever. In that way, most of us came to know each other in the course.

\* \* \* \* \*

I am able to read something and first of all judge what I'm reading it for and then be able to just take out what I need out of it instead of jotting down "X" number of notes that were usually useless anyway. (pause) I think I'm a little bit more selective in what I read, too. (Bob, II, pp. 1, 3)

At first I had to drive myself. But once I got here, I really enjoyed it because she would talk about reading, too, but other things in general, like school and everything. . . . I didn't know if it was going to be like high school. But once I got there, I liked everything better because it was like a smaller class. I think she had more time for each person. . . . I think you should



offer something like this in high school. Maybe it will train us for college or for whatever (we) wanted to go on to. . . . I think it helped a lot. I know it did. (Leslie, II, pp. 1, 2)

Two students felt that the course was not extremely beneficial and that it did not change them much as readers. One gives his reaction to the course:

I really think this class stinks. The only thing I've gotten out of this class is, maybe, how to clarify note-taking. As far as improving my reading, it hasn't. As far as making me look into things better, it hasn't done that. I don't think it's made me any more efficient, except to teach me to read the first and last paragraph first. It's not that it stinks, cause some people are really probably getting a lot out of it. I was expecting to learn more and I didn't. It was pretty much of a let-down. I expected to be able to improve my skills eight hundred and fifty percent, but I haven't done that. (Craig, II, p. 1)

Lawrence, though he says he enjoyed the course (particularly the class interaction and the "easy-going" classroom atmosphere), felt that he, too, had remained the same as a reader and that the course had not changed his dislike for reading.

For the most part, students found the materials for the course challenging and interesting. Bob explains why he found the materials enjoyable:

First of all the selection of the materials . . . It wasn't all one specific thing, you know. It was a variety of everything. Most of the stuff she chose, I had little or no knowledge of, which I think is another reason why it made it also enjoyable. (II, p. 5)

He reveals that he read articles in the package that were never assigned for class:

One night I was sitting up and I found that I had--well the books I had in the house I didn't feel like reading and then I had a stack of books given to me that none of

them (the titles of them) seemed to interest me at all. So I said, 'Well, next best thing.' It was sort of chosen out of desperation. But then, um, I found when I got into reading them I enjoyed a lot of the material. (II, p. 5)

Delores reacts to the readings:

There were things that, as I told you, I would not read on my own. But, I feel as though if this was the required thing to do, it was okay with me. And I did read it and felt like I did get some information out of it. But I wouldn't say 'I've got to save that article' and go back to it. But I thought all of \_\_\_\_\_ articles were really good. (II, p. 9)

She remarks that her interests in reading have become more varied:

I think now I'm aware that there's a lot more to offer besides (Harold) Robbins. Although he's a good storyteller, I don't have to put up with the trash. I think that's the conclusion I've come to after taking this course. (II, p. 10)

Though there were varied impressions about the extent to which individual participants did or did not enjoy reading the articles and stories, the class-wide sentiment about reading Smith (though not necessarily perceptions about his ideas) were unanimous. Many of the readers discussed things they had learned about the reading process in relation to Frank Smith. They spoke of them, not so much as changes in their concepts of the reading process, but as seminal bits of information they had learned:

I read it (some of the other readings), oohh, with bitterness really. Just like that Frank Smith. I read that book. I said, 'I hate you. I hate you.' Alright. The material is definitely good practice and it made you think and this is what I needed. And I needed to have it. (Nora, II, pp. 5-6)

Frank Smith, as the man, I think is boring; but he did have some great points. For instance, he showed you the difference between visual and non-visual information.

Non-visual information is things that you know about and visual information you can pick out of an article and out of a book you're reading. He also talked about the fact that when you're reading, if you're a slow reader, it means that you're a poor reader, because you don't have to get every word. He said that when you go over a word and it doesn't mean anything to you, or you can't recognize it or pronounce it, just keep going on and you will find the definition. Also, he had some good things about teaching reading to children. He maintained that when you teach a child to read, you shouldn't spend too much time bogging down in 'See Dick walk.' Let the child get into non-visual information and bring himself into the story. Actually, kids couldn't care less about Dick running. I know I couldn't. And that becomes boring to the kids. So as a beginning reader when that's boring, attention span is gone. I can't imagine Frank Smith being a newspaper man. I can't imagine him covering a murder. He would be so boring. I felt that he wasn't a good author, but that he did have some information to offer. I think he researched his information well, but I don't think that he knew how to keep anybody interested. (Delores, II, pp. 11-12)

(Reading Frank Smith) It was not pleasurable, that's for sure. It was a little pain really. But it did give me-- it did give me--very good pointers. (Eva, II, p. 7)

One student felt that Smith had prompted her to examine her own learning to read process a little more closely:

When you asked that question about how I began to read, I thought 'My God, how did I begin?' And really there is no way (of) learning like he said. You just keep on reading like you always do and no one really can teach it. You just have to more or less do it on your own. And I said, 'My God, how did I ever learn how to read,' and reading his novel makes you, you know. He said there is no way of teaching it really, just to read along with you and have you read once and a while. And he said that to read well, you can't be afraid to make mistakes. A lot of things I thought were interesting. But I thought he repeated himself quite a bit, you know. (Leslie, II, p. 3)

Bob felt that Smith took on a large segment of the reading society with his negative assessment of phonics in reading programs:

He's wrecking our whole social upbringing there. . . . Most of us were taught to read by phonics. He destroyed my whole illusion. (laughs) No, he was right about what he said about phonics was that no one can actually learn to read using phonics. He was right. There was a lot of things in there I agreed with, but I mean it was just his way of coming across and writing them. I didn't feel that he had to repeat himself "X" number of times just to get his point across. I mean, I got his point the first sentence. And that was enough for me. (II, p. 7)

Bob did, however, attribute a change in his attitude about reading to Frank Smith:

The things I've probably changed was the old habit of when you come across a word that you don't know, that's another point that Frank Smith made that was good--I don't stop and look up the word anymore. At one time, I used to stop and say, 'Who cares.' After a word, I('d) never go back to reading it. (laughs) I don't think I do that anymore. I probably have the tendency to stop, but then I push myself to stick--(keep) going. (Bob, II, p. 9)

Survey data. Participants received a pre- and post-score on the "Adult Reading Survey." Group means and standard deviations for both the pre-test and post-test were calculated and the t-test for significance applied to the difference. (See Table 1.) On the pre-test with a possible score of 30 for reading process, participants' scores ranged from 11 to 26. The mean was 18.1 with a standard deviation of 4.2. On the post-test, scores ranged from 14 to 27 with a mean of 20.6 and a standard deviation of 3.1. The t-value for the difference was 2.04, which proved to be significant at the .05 level.

Research Question No. 3:  
Will a Reading Process Orientation to Reading Improve  
Syntactic and Semantic Processing  
Abilities of Readers?

To examine this question, pre- and post-scores for grammatical acceptability and semantic acceptability on the Reading Miscue Inventory (RMI) [Goodman and Burke, 1972] were obtained. Grammatical acceptability is determined by answering the question, "Does this miscue occur in a sentence which is grammatically (syntactically) acceptable?" Semantic acceptability is determined by answering the question, "Does this miscue occur in a sentence which is semantically acceptable?" Scores indicate the percentage of miscues which are acceptable in each case. In addition, pre- and post-scores for total comprehension loss and pre- and post-retelling scores are examined.

Syntactic processing. Group means and standard deviations for the pre- and post-test were calculated. On the pre-test, participants' scores ranged from 72 to 92. The mean was 85.2 with a standard deviation of 8.85. On the post-test, participants' scores ranged from 60 to 96. The mean was 86.8 with a standard deviation of 11.1. The t-value for the difference between the pre- and post-test scores was .38 and was not significant at the .05 level.

Semantic processing. On the pre-test, participants' scores ranged from 20 to 72. The mean was 40 with a standard deviation of 14.60. On the post-test, participants' scores ranged from 36 to 64. Mean was 46.6 with a standard deviation of 12.0. The t-value was 2.21 which was



significant at the .05 level.

Comprehension loss. The questions on the RMI which determine correction (whether or not a reader corrects a miscue), semantic acceptability and meaning change (whether or not a miscue results in a change of meaning) produce a pattern which gives insight into whether there has been meaning loss (RMI Manual, p. 26). These patterns indicated whether the miscues have resulted in no loss, partial loss or complete loss of comprehension.

Pre- and post-test scores for complete comprehension loss were obtained. Scores represent the percentage of miscues which resulted in a "complete loss" pattern, i.e., the percentage of miscues from which the reader gains no meaning. On the pre-test, scores for participants ranged from 12 to 88 percent. The mean score was 60 with a standard deviation of 20.5. On the post-test, scores ranged from 20 to 72 percent. The mean score was 48.6 with a standard deviation of 17.6. The t-value for the difference was -2.64 and proved significant at the .05 level.

Retelling scores. Scores on the retelling pre-test ranged from 20 to 100. The mean was 53.4 with a standard deviation of 22.9. On the retelling post-test, scores ranged from 12 to 68. The mean was 49.46 with a standard deviation of 15.23. The t-value for the difference was -.89 which was not significant at the .05 level.

Research Question No. 4:  
Will a Reading Process Orientation to Reading Improve  
Readers' Scores on the Reading Placement Test?

Pre- and post-scores on the Reading Placement Test were obtained to examine this question. Group means and standard deviations were calculated. On the pre-test, participants' percentile scores ranged from 13 to 92. The mean was 42.8 with a standard deviation of 26.0, indicating a high degree of variability. Post-scores ranged from 8 to 92. The mean was 47.2 with a standard deviation of 25.9. The t-value for the difference was .98 which was not significant at the .05 level.

Research Question No. 5:  
What Are the Major Patterns Concerning Reading That Evolve  
From the Participants' Discussions of Themselves  
as Readers and the Reading Process?

A content analysis of themes in the interview data revealed a variety of interdependent patterns in respondents' beliefs and perceptions of the informal and formal instructional practices in reading; perceptions of the reading process--their beliefs about what reading is and what it means to be a reader; and self-analysis of their reading experiences and descriptions of their involvement with the practice of reading. These patterns revealed important and long-held perceptions of the interviewees. Their beliefs about and evaluation of the reading process were shaped by their experiences. Their stories evidenced that these experiences continued to inform what they valued as efficient readers.

Instructional practices (informal). In the past, it was common practice for schools to caution parents against indulging in pre-school instruction, especially in the area of teaching reading. While there is still debate about the positive or negative effects of teaching children at home, there is a growing body of literature on the merits of early reading and pre-reading instruction (Durkin, Torrey et al.). Respondents in this study were asked to recall their pre-school and earliest reading experiences to explore whether informal or home reading instruction played an important role in their learning to read or their desire to learn to read. Responses varied in detail, but most recalled some interaction with significant others, either one or both parents or older siblings before beginning school. The interaction often took the form of being read to by parents or receiving instruction in a "let's-play-school" mode with siblings and sometimes with neighborhood contemporaries.

Craig describes his pre-school environment as one in which encouragement to question and learn was given from a number of sources--his mother, his father, but especially his older sister:

I got a little sister, M \_\_\_\_\_, and M \_\_\_\_\_'s one grade behind me . . . and we seemed to be the ones my sister, N \_\_\_\_\_, taught. She'd go around, and she'd just go around and start teaching and walking around showing us how to read. Like she'd read a sentence and we'd repeat it right after her, whether we understood it or not. But it taught us to at least try to recognize some words. It wasn't that bad. I remember one book. It was just an alphabet book. We still have it now. . . . We'd have like "A" is for airplane, and my sister would go and she'd say "A" is for airplane--the one that Daddy flew to Miami with. And, you know, "B" is for ball. And we'd have to take it from there. We'd have to make up stories with it. (Craig, I, p. 1)

Other stories conveyed similar sentiments:

Yeah, my sister and my mother would read to me. And we started out, you know how--I'm trying to think if I knew how to read before I even went to school or not. I think I did a little bit because I remember books and things. But I think around kindergarten, around four or five, I just started to learn how to read. It would be like Dr. Seuss and stuff like that my sisters had. (George, I, p. 1)

I think before I learned how to read, she (mother) used to read every night to me. Cause they said it was good. But then after I learned how to read, she used to make me read it to her. (Christine, I, p. 5)

Yes! Yes! My mother used to read me fairy tales. She used to take time out. She bought me books. And when I got older, when I could read on my own, it just simply stopped. (Nora, I, p. 2)

Both Nora and Christine speak of this weaning from being read to with some dismay. With the accomplishment of learning to read came an alteration in a familiar and cherished relationship--a new dimension that was not quite as pleasurable as the old practice.

The majority of the respondents recalled the availability of reading materials in their homes--newspapers, magazines, books. They recalled seeing at least one of their parents, usually their mother, reading most often as a source of pleasure but sometimes for information. Even though the question was phrased in a way to include both parents, the mother was usually referred to by the respondents. The response was the same for the subjects whose mothers worked outside of the home as well as the fathers. Respondents did say of their mothers, "She worked and didn't always have time to read to me," but never made those comments about their fathers. Only one of the respondents mentions that

his father read to him as a child. For this sample, the mother was the dominant role model for reading.

The climate in the home, parents' predisposition toward learning, had a major impact on the perceptions respondents had about their pre-school and early learning experiences. For that reason, a few respondents could not relate positive sentiments about learning in the home. When asked about their early reading experiences, their responses were less specific, very few concrete memories. Rather, their responses invariably lead to more global perceptions about learning, including why learning was more important for some than for others. Their perspectives of their home environments often reflected cultural and social biases. Eva, born and educated in Germany, noted that it was a lower-class German belief that too much education caused insanity.

My mother was a great reader. She used to enjoy reading when she was a young woman. But she made, felt guilty by my grandmother. (My grandmother made her feel guilty.) And so she gave up reading . . . because it was, then they were under the assumption that people read, it would go to their head. They would go bananas. (I, p. 2)

Biased attitudes of this sort were more prominent in, but not exclusive to, the older students in the sample. It would be speculative to say that these biases grew out of family social position, but there is evidence of a symbiotic relationship.

Delores' story is a poignant and illustrative example of the effect of cultural milieu on one's attitudes about learning. Delores describes her home as being dominated by an authoritarian father and as being an environment in which school was regarded as some place to



be until one was old enough to find a job and contribute to the household:

I really can't remember, as a child, reading. And I think one of the reasons is because there were six children. My father was . . . worked every week but never brought home the money, and I think that my mother didn't have the time or the education to open books for us. I really wasn't aware of books, per se, until I was thirty. . . . because the family was so dominated by my father who was never wrong, whether he was right or wrong, and who we never asked a question of, or we never expressed our opinions to. I think because of the fact that he was, I wouldn't say that he was illiterate, but he was damn close to it and didn't want--obviously (it) would have been a threat to him if one of the kids did read or at least ask a question. My mother, to keep peace, just went along with him because it was easier than arguing with him, which she never did. . . . And she never knew any better because she never went out. She never did anything. She was never exposed to anything else. So she never knew that there was anything different. She thought this is how life is supposed to be. (Delores, I, pp. 1-2)

There are a variety of unique dynamics interacting in Delores' story. Nonetheless, economic considerations determined how important education was and at what point it was no longer useful, especially in lower-income families:

My father was Canadian--and my mother. They're both French. And, you know, you got out of high school and you went to work. That was enough education. (Nora, I, p. 2)

I knew that I wouldn't be able to go on to college and to get a job, I made the decision that the business course would be the best course for me to take. (Peggy, I, p. 2)

A different economic situation prompted Bob to drop out of school in tenth grade. He had never really enjoyed school and had experienced some reading difficulties throughout most of his school career. When his father suffered a heart attack, he dropped out of school in the

second half of his sophomore year and began working full-time at a hospital laundry where he had previously held a part-time job. He was told that he could return to school as part of the junior class if he completed courses during summer school:

Interviewer: One of the things that you haven't mentioned that you told me before is that you dropped out of school to get a job.

Bob: That was in eleventh grade. I only went there one day (back to school).

Interviewer: But you already had the job before you went back. You were on your vacation or something like that.

Bob: Well, I had the job when I was in the tenth grade. I was in the \_\_\_\_\_ Hospital laundry. So I was going to school, working. So in eleventh grade, I still had the job. I was on vacation. I took a week's vacation the first week of school and went back to school, and it just bored me. The whole school system bored me. I couldn't see the point of staying in school and doing nothing, when I was out earning one-hundred bucks a week. So I left. My father also had a heart attack at the time, so the only means of support was the fact that my paycheck was coming in.

Interviewer: Was it a big decision for you to make?

Bob: I think so. Even though school bored me, I had intended to finish and get my high school diploma. I figured that I had invested that many years, why not just finish. So, I think, yes it was a big decision. (I, pp. 19-20)

Bob implies that he intended to finish high school and then get a job. Because of his family's financial circumstances, he was forced to work full-time before receiving his diploma. He realized that he had

already achieved his end goal--getting a job--without having to endure the rest of the schooling process, a process that he found dull and frustrating.

For the most part, these respondents felt that they had a limited choice about the direction that their lives would take after high school. Their external motivation was tied to an economic outcome--getting a job. And, in Delores' and Bob's cases, when that goal was attainable without a high school diploma, schooling was no longer a necessity. (Delores also dropped out of school and got a job.)

Instructional practices (formal). Subjects were asked to recall what they could about being taught to read--what kinds of materials they remembered and ways in which teachers approached or attempted to teach them reading. Cohen (1974-75) and Barr (1972) have determined in studies done with children that reading behavior is influenced by prior reading instruction. This author felt that prior reading instruction may still be reflected in present attitudes and practices of adults.

The majority of the respondents marked first grade as the actual beginning of formal reading instruction. Kindergarten was described as a "play-time," a "nap-time," a time for doing basic learning activities (e.g., drawing, coloring, learning shapes, etc.). Bob described it as a time to learn about the structure of school. In general, most respondents felt it was an introduction to acclimating to school life. Several respondents felt that they knew a little about reading before kindergarten--the alphabet and some words--but not an extensive amount.

In the first grade, the respondents were introduced formally to certain teaching techniques and materials. Most notable were basal materials (skills and sight-word instruction using controlled vocabulary and content); phonics (sound-symbol correlations); and grouping (organizing students by ability and/or needs).

Basals. All except one of the respondents related some experience with basal materials. (Eva, the one exception, could remember nothing at all about reading instruction in her early years in school. She felt she had blocked it all out because she hated school very much as a child.) For this sample, the influence of basals spanned forty years:

We had certain textbooks. We had your low reading group and your middle reading group and you had a high reading group, and people in the high reading group would get all the good books. I had this one book called Galaxy. . . . And we had a word book to go along with it. They'd have little stories in there that you'd read, would, then they'd have questions (that you could answer), like 'yes' and 'no.' (Anne, I, p. 4)

I cannot recall exactly how I learned or what was used other than Dick and Jane. (Peggy, I, p. 1)

First grade . . . I remember the books of 'Look, Jane, look.' (Bob, I, p. 1)

We did a couple of things, like 'See Spot run.' And, you know, 'Jane, chase after Spot.' (Craig, I, p. 2)

It was like what we were talking about the other day-- 'Dick,' 'Jane,' 'ball.' It was like the same thing repeated over and over in sound. (Christine, I, p. 2)

They had (pause), 'Jack went over Scott,' or something; then they have, you know, they'd be real attractive and they'd have other characters like, there's a dog or something. After you finished the book, there would be another and then another one. (Leslie, I, p. 2)

In a class discussion, prompted by the reading of Bruno Bettelheim's article, the majority of the class expressed negative feelings about the basal format, citing them as unimaginative. Eva argued that it did not really matter that children got boring books to read because it was a place for them to start and "they went on to more complex things." She continued that books may have removed reality from their content but that kids could experience reality outside of books in their daily lives. Delores countered that "See Spot run" offered no stimulation of the imagination and that the repetition was boring. There was a general consensus of the class, also, that home environment played an important role in reading and that parents must show an interest because children look to them as role models.

Phonics. Phonics instruction proved to be equally as prominent as basal readers in the respondents' remembrances about formal instructional practices. Subjects were asked to describe methods that were used to teach them reading:

They just showed you how to pronounce the words, and in case you had trouble, sometimes how to divide them-- maybe so you can say the whole word. (Leslie, I, p. 2)

You'd have the book, and it would show you like the "B's" and the "A's" and so forth. "B-A" and then "B-A-M" and then it would go on like that. (Eva, I, p. 5)

You would go through the alphabet, every letter you'd have to know what--like a "C" is, can be "S" or "K", all those neat little things you should know about language. And she'd go through it with us. . . . They had cards, too, I remember. I remember cards with "C" and "TH", "Cruh" and "Chuh". . . . As I remember it, it was more or less the same thing everyday. We'd go through the routine of letters and pronunciation. (George, I, p. 2)



While some respondents, in retrospect, stated that they assumed that this was a logical way of attacking the basics of learning to read, others were confused and frustrated by the process.

She would say like "a" and then give you the sound of a. Eventually, as you got it together and put it to words and sound out a word like (pause) whatever the word was in the book, if you sat there and (if) it took you all day to sound out the word, then you sat there all day to sound out that word. Then you moved to the next word. In the process of a year, you could possibly cover four words. (Bob, I, p. 4)

I hated it. I did it. I did it mechanically. I still don't know what I learned from it. We did phonics up until fourth grade. What I learned, I don't know. I still don't know what phonics is for. I'm a graduated senior, and an entering freshman in college. I still don't know what phonics is. (Craig, I, p. 11)

Few of the respondents questioned, as Craig does, the value of phonics. Bob, who implies that phonics was not the answer to his particular reading problems (Bob, II, p. 8), felt that it may have more worth as a spelling tool than a reading one. Phonics heavily influenced some respondents' definitions of what reading is. Pronounceability, being able to correctly produce an oral rendering, was a major concern.

Grouping. Grouping, in practice, takes many forms: grouping by ability, grouping by need, or grouping by interest. An enormous amount of grouping is based on pupil ability to achieve at certain tasks. This achievement is frequently determined by performance on standardized tests:

Leslie: They had like reading group 1, 2 and 3 and there were about seven in each group, or eight or ten, depending on the class.

Interviewer: How were the groups decided?

Leslie: I really don't know. I think they would give you a test or something; maybe they thought that you had trouble in the beginning or they moved you down or whatever. (Leslie, I, p. 3)

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Marie: Well, we would go into groups by our level.

Interviewer: By your level? How was your level defined?

Marie: By the teacher, by the tests, by taking tests.

Interviewer: So you remember taking tests in order to go into a reading group.

Marie: Umm. (Indicating "Yes")

Interviewer: So what group did you go into?

Marie: I think there was two, and I was in the second one.

Interviewer: And how was that group defined?

Marie: Like the high and the low.

Interviewer: And the second group was . . . ?

Marie: Was the low one. (I, p. 3)

\* \* \* \* \*

She used to have this bulletin board, and it'd have like a little path going and--five paths--and there was five different groups and each one had a little frog, and everytime everyone read a little story and got a good grade on the test, your frog moved up and the winner either got to go to recess early or candy or something. I used to read. I used to just read for that. (Craig, I, p. 3)

The situation Craig recalls was not initially determined by a standardized test, but random selection. However, the focus on ability and,

more precisely, competitive ability is evident.

As in Craig's case, where the competitive spirit motivated him to read, some good may come from grouping when the individual's needs are being met.

When I was in school, the classrooms weren't like twenty kids or fifteen. They were large. There were over fifty children. The teacher . . . could not give individual attention. So if somebody was slow, like I was, they were pushed to one side . . . (going on to describe being put in a special class). I remember going to this class, and I enjoyed it. I really did because the class was smaller and I got to have attention. I realized a lot of these things after I gradually grew older. Why I was selected I don't know. The only reason I come to is that I was held back in third grade and they thought they'd give me individual attention to find out what was wrong. (Nora, I, pp. 3-4)

Summary. Several respondents related informal home experiences and learning to read, but most marked first grade as the beginning of reading instruction. The stories indicated traditional, non-process experiences with respondents citing basal materials and phonics drills as a major part of their instructional remembrances. In retrospect, students felt that basal texts were unimaginative. Few questioned the efficacy of phonics, assuming that it was a logical way to teach reading basics. In a later discussion of myths and beliefs about reading and respondents' definitions of reading, the influence of this kind of instruction is quite evident. Respondents also recalled being grouped by ability for reading instruction.

Spheres of influence. The influence of peers, authority figures (i.e., parents and teachers) and interest in materials available to

read were topics of significant concern for all of the respondents.

Peers. All of the subjects measured their own abilities in comparison to those around them, and many expressed frustrations with self-imposed criteria and frequently cited peer success as an impetus for motivation. All of the respondents had internalized conceptions of the model reader and in assessing themselves determined that they did not meet the standard. This internalization process continued throughout all of their schooling and was evident even in present-day observations. Respondents continued to ask, "Where am I in relation to those around me?"

There was this one girl, she could read really fast. And I hung around with her. I couldn't understand her she was reading so fast. The teacher would always say (to her), 'Slow down, slow down,' and I'd go home and I'd try to do it. I'd try to do just what she did. She could remember everything! She whipped through it. She raced through the sentences. She'd remember everything, every little thing, every little detail. And when I'd try to do and (laughs) I'd stumble over everything. I couldn't understand one thing. (Anne, I, p. 3)

Later in the interview, Anne says:

I wanted to keep up. I didn't want to be behind. I wanted to be with my friends. I wanted to be smart so I tried to keep up any way I could. . . . I never wanted to be behind. I always wanted to be right there with everybody. (I, p. 4)

Barbara only alludes to the stigma attached to "not keeping up."

But for Christine, the pain and embarrassment of needing remedial instruction was a vivid reality:

(It was like) we weren't as smart as the other kids or something. . . . I think it was keeping up with everyone else (why she needed remedial help). I just couldn't read the words that they were reading, the level that they were

at. . . . Sometimes I thought I couldn't read as well as everyone else. (Christine, I, pp. 3-4)

The descriptions of peer influence on reading varied. Some relationships were motivating and had a healthy effect; others were ego-debilitating. The more satisfying memories regarding peers and reading revolved around sharing of reading materials with contemporaries. Some respondents recalled doing this on a limited basis in high school but more so as a part of their adult experiences:

There are a number of women at work who love to read and books will be discussed and we'll say to each other you should read such and such and exchange paperbacks.

(And of her husband) My husband and I today will read aloud if we find an article . . . if we run across things we feel the other person would like . . . I'll read a paragraph or a chapter, an article out of Reader's Digest or something like that. In fact, he has enjoyed immensely the Reading Without Nonsense (required reading for the class). (Peggy, I, pp. 4, 9)

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There are people that would say, well, it started in nursing school, 'Did you read this book, did you read that book?' And then these other people would say, 'Oh, I read a terrific book,' and we'd talk about it. And I would think, 'Oh, I ought to do that, too.' So then I would start (to read and) to talk about it. (Delores, I, p. 18)

Peer influence frequently was the basis for interest in certain reading materials. Anne even tried to force herself to be interested in reading books to be part of a group that shared reading materials:

I never really read any of the books they read. Like there'd be five girls that traded books. And, 'Oh, this is good,' and 'Read that,' and I'd be left out of it. I couldn't take the time to sit down and read stories, even if I wanted to. (I, p. 10)



Even in the "Reading Efficiency" class, the evidence of peer influence was strong.

My classmate is, and the other girls, listening to what they say. I know one reads an awful lot. You can tell by her mannerism, her composure, her talking ability, and also another girl. They are all versatile in reading materials. And I don't feel as if I can be in that group and I want to feel as if -- O.K. I (can) read such and such a book, and I named the book. The name of the author is this. I cannot say this because, there again, time is against me for sitting down and reading. (Nora, II, pp. 4-5)

Parents and teachers. The influence of authority figures, those forces who exercise the most social control over students, was prominently noted in the stories of the respondents. The role of parental encouragement (or the lack thereof) was a key influence on reading and general study patterns for the subjects in this study.

Delores and Nora both address the lack of encouragement that existed in their family environment. The ways in which each responded is unique and personal and at opposite ends of the spectrum:

I can remember being in high school, and I can remember feeling very dumb, and I can remember people that were in (the) class, like the president--kids like this that I knew were going to go to college someday and thinking how lucky they were that they had the brains to do it and (I) didn't know that everybody does. But it was never nurtured in our house. . . . I would pass, but my mother would never say to me, 'Let me see your grades. Let me see your report card. What is this? What does that mean?' She never participated. (I, pp. 2-3)

Later, Delores laments:

I can remember when nobody ever demanded of me. Nobody ever said that I don't want that because I know that you can do better. I know that you've got more brains than that. I know that you can exercise that brain. Nobody ever said that. So for me it was just do what would get me by. (Delores, I, p. 6)

Delores resigns herself to her family's expectations. She describes herself as being threatened by all authority figures as a result of her interaction with her father. Her response to that threat was to retreat, from confrontations with her parents and with her teachers as well.

Nora discusses not being encouraged at home, but she does not include Delores' sense of desperation, of hopelessness. Though never verbally encouraged by her parents, Nora recalls her mother being pleased when she did well. These signs of pleasure with her endeavors, though minimal, positively reinforced her efforts and, in part, accounted for her self-determination:

But to be encouraged--she never said, 'Well, hey, read this book. This book is good.' She never encouraged me--neither one of my parents encouraged me to do anything. . . . I did things on my own. . . . I had to take the initiative with my life. I've always done this. I was independent. (Nora, I, p. 1)

Another part of Nora's independence and self-determination came from wanting to ease the marital tensions that existed between her parents. Her efforts reflected an attempt to be a good girl so that her parents would not fight. Much of her energies were devoted to making her mother happy. Unlike Delores, Nora was motivated to transcend the unpleasant conditions of her home environment by doing what she could on her own. Rather than retreating, jumping in feet first was her response.

Delores and Nora chose individual routes to handling their situations, unique survival strategies that got them each what they wanted.

Some of the other respondents, however, were encouraged by their parents. Craig, early in his monologue, describes the encouragement he received from both parents:

Well, see, my father and mother both got their Master's. My mother is an English teacher. Both of them encouraged us to read. . . . My parents always encouraged us. Even if it was just comic books, we were reading. . . . Our parents encouraged us, but they didn't force us. (Craig, I, pp. 1, 4)

Craig cites being read to by both parents, being given books as gifts and having his parents take time to explain printed matter to him as active ways that his parents showed encouragement for reading.

Peggy speaks of knowing the alphabet and numbers before entering school:

Because my mother was interested, you know. She would see I, she would spend some time with me. She had more time to spend with me than she did the rest of the family. . . . So I know I knew my alphabet, my numbers and things. (I, p. 2)

Other respondents were less specific in their descriptions but did relate positive experiences about their parents' roles in their academic growth. Lawrence describes himself as being slow and having learning difficulties early on. He speaks of his father's efforts to have him tested at the local university. He also recalls both parents helping him with school work and sometimes reading difficult materials with him and trying to explain it to him.

Though Eva says she was neither encouraged or discouraged by her mother, she could recall her mother hiring a math tutor for her because "she felt that she wanted to do this for me . . . that it would be better for me" (Eva, I, p. 2).

Generally, most of the respondents conveyed the sense that their parents attempted to be helpful and were concerned about their progress in a number of areas.

On the whole, the discussion of students' interactions with teachers took a more negative tone. This generalization must be qualified to the extent that teachers do not have the opportunity for the same quantity or quality of experiences that children enjoy with their parents. There are limitations on student/teacher interactions, limitations borne out of the social structure of schools and the roles of teachers and students within that structure. There is also the possibility that unpleasant teacher interactions tend to be recalled more readily. Therefore, the view that the respondents recall of teachers may not be a fair, representative cross-section. They are, however, of particular import and consequence to the respondents.

Several of the respondents expressed the feeling that the teachers really did not care. Anne, as a person who had obviously processed some of her concerns about her reading ability, speaks at length about her teachers:

I had one teacher who really--when I was first getting into reading--she would never let me read. And when she did, I didn't want to because I knew she didn't like the way I read. And really, the whole year after that I would never read out loud in front of the class. . . . I was very embarrassed and conscious of my reading out loud. I was nervous in front of all my friends. They could read so much better than I could. And here she was, she wouldn't help me. She wanted to keep with them, increase their ability, never mind me. That's the way I felt. I'd sometimes cry about it. (Anne, I, p. 3)

Later in the interview, Anne recalls a teacher noticing her difficulty with reading:

It was the teacher who noticed I was still reading after everybody was finished. They were already on the questions and I was still on the second page. Everybody else was going right through everything. I was struggling. . . . I don't remember him trying to help me. He confronted me with it, but I got mad at him when he did that. . . . He had me sit down and wanted to know what was wrong. I was having so much trouble keeping up with everybody else. And I really didn't know because nobody had ever told me I was doing the wrong thing. I thought it was just me but not the way I was taught. But I really think it might have been the way I was taught or at least the ways I interpreted it. And he would ask me, 'What's wrong? What's the difficulty?' I could not tell him anything. I didn't know what was wrong. I wanted somebody to tell me. He just explained to me there was something wrong, but I don't remember him ever trying to help me. (Anne, I, p. 5)

Bob echoes Anne's sentiment:

And I never ran across an instructor that was willing to help. Whether they knew or what the story was. (Bob, I, p. 12)

Bob characterized himself as being a slow reader and feels that he had had difficulties with reading since second grade. The similarities in his and Anne's stories are remarkable. He also recalls being deliberately overlooked for oral reading activities by teachers-- "Once I was called on, once--that was it" (p. 11). Both Bob and Anne remembered being told that they would outgrow their problems or that in time they would learn things that they had missed. Both Bob and Anne felt that they needed and deserved more attention than others, but that help never came:



I think that probably with a different teacher, I mean if I was standing in front of that class now, teaching a student like myself, I would insist on them, more than somebody reading above or to their level. I would probably insist on them reading more. Cause avoiding it isn't going to solve the problem. (Bob, I, p. 12)

Clearly, Bob's perception of teachers' attitudes and the structure of student-teacher relationships blocked communication with his teachers. And probably, as a result, he never considered confronting teachers about his reading problems:

It was the type of attitude throughout the school that I went to that you were the student, and they were the teachers. They were the superiors. We were the inferiors, and you did as you were told. (Bob, I, p. 12)

Nora blames large class size as part of the teacher's problem in her particular situation:

When I went to school, the classrooms weren't like twenty kids or fifteen. They were large. There were over fifty children. The teacher at that time, she could not give individual attention. So if somebody was slow, like I was, they were pushed to one side. (I, p. 3)

Craig felt that teachers put undue pressures on students, particularly in the areas of reading. He responds to why he felt he had to read fast in order to be a good reader:

Because of the teachers and that way they'd say, 'O.K. Five minutes. Read ten pages.' And I couldn't do it. So, you know, I really got down on myself and I tried to read faster. But when I tried to read faster, I('d) get poorer scores. So, I really put the blame on the teachers. . . . I think maybe it's an adequate feeling (i.e., that his reading is adequate), but I still get the feeling that I'm not reading well enough. And if I don't read quick(ly), that I'm not reading well enough . . . I felt as if I wasn't getting enough time and I could do a good job. . . . You know, the teachers are weird. If I'd put the blame anywhere, I'd put it on them. I just couldn't get the sense of being competent enough. (Craig, I, p. 14)

Craig and many of the other respondents looked to their teachers, as well as their parents and peers, to confirm for them that they were performing in normal ways, that their actions had some merit. When that confirmation was lacking or slow to come, conflict was created.

Teachers evoked a variety of motivational responses in the subjects in this study. Eva states emphatically, "If I couldn't stand a teacher, I did badly" (Eva, I, p. 8). Nora declares that if she likes someone she works hard to do well. Craig was motivated by the challenge of a demanding teacher, describing one teacher as a "witch and a half" and in the next breath saying "but she makes you work."

Not all of the respondents had disparaging memories of their teachers. Peggy and George recalled with some fondness teachers in high school who they found interesting, stimulating and likeable. Lawrence describes his sixth grade teacher as being very helpful, working very closely with him and becoming a trusted friend. Delores received much support and encouragement from a teacher/administrator in nursing school. Such incidents as these, however, were sparsely sprinkled throughout the respondents' stories.

Interests. A number of the respondents suggested lack of interest in the materials being used in class as a major source of dissatisfaction in high school.

As a female extremely interested in sports (to the point of near exclusion of any other topic), Marie found little to read that ever really held her attention. Because Marie had little interest in what was being read, she also felt little patience with trying to understand

any of it:

It just didn't sink in, so why would I want to read it if it didn't sink in? Cause it was stupid. . . . Why should we have to read (it). I never liked it. (Marie, I, p. 5)

Marie recalls reading sports stories outside of school and enjoying them because she enjoyed participating in the same type of sports activities and because she could understand what the stories were about. She suggests that maybe if she had varied her interests more as a child she might have done better at reading, but "I just concentrated on the one thing (i.e., sports) and that was it."

Bob recalls that school and all of its learning activities bored him:

School bored me ever since I started it. From first grade up . . . the whole format was what bored me. (Bob, pp. 4-5)

Besides being bored by school, Bob says that it was hard for him to relate to what was going on in books. In high school, he became a member of the student patrol. He was attracted to this organization because it afforded him the opportunity to miss certain classes, especially English.

Interviewer: Why did you decide to join the student patrol?

Bob: Because it was a way, away from Shakespeare. And in September, when we started, she said, 'I love Shakespeare.' I said, 'Oh, no.' She said, 'I assure you by December of this year you will have read every one of Shakespeare's works.' And I said, 'No!' And that's the reason I joined the student patrol. I knew I could avoid Shakespeare that way. No interest in reading him. (I, p. 15)

George explains why one class in particular was uninteresting for him:

George: Ninth grade English. . . . I really don't like mythology because, I don't know, it wasn't reality, and I couldn't really relate to it very well. We had this, we'd have questions that we'd have to study and I wasn't really very interested in (it).

Interviewer: How did you feel about having to read and study mythology if you couldn't relate to it?

George: I didn't like it. It seemed like to me it was a waste of my time just being (there) when she was doing that in the class. I didn't do good in it either because I didn't like it.

Interviewer: Did you understand it and not like it, or . . .

George: Well, you could understand it but, I don't know. It just wasn't reality, I guess. That's what turned me off to it. It was something made up.

When asked what kinds of things he would have preferred to read, George responds:

I like history. I would have rather had that. . . . I would have rather, probably, read something--something about sports maybe, or I'm not really sure. I knew that we'd never, we'd never have the choice of what we do. That's why it's kind of hard to figure out what I would have liked. (George, I, p. 6)

George's outlook is one of resignation. There are few, if any, opportunities for suggesting alternatives in materials selection. This is a realization that George says he came to very early on in his interactions with schools.

Christine bemoans having to read Thoreau.

I had Early American writers in Sophomore year. For there we did Thoreau, stuff like that. I didn't like that at all. All I wanted to do was pass. . . . We had to analyze and put yourself into his place. I didn't like that at all.

(Interviewer: What was it you disliked about putting yourself into his place?)

Well, this guy was weird. (laughs) This one was really bad. He loved nature and nature (was this) and nature was that and everything's got to be perfect out there, you know. I just feel different(ly) about it. (Christine, I, pp. 12-13)

Christine was obviously not the only one who feels differently.

Summary. Respondents related that peers, parents, teachers and their personal interests played important roles in their reading experiences. Respondents noted that their image of a good reader was shaped by their observations of their peers and of what teachers valued. Respondents evaluated themselves in light of those observations. Some students recalled fairly positive interactions with their parents, either in the form of encouragement or actual assistance with reading tasks. On the other hand, many students expressed negative interactions with teachers who seemed unwilling to help with specific reading problems. A number of respondents recalled lack of interest in the reading materials available in school, especially in high school. In addition, they felt little recourse in changing those materials.

Myths/beliefs about reading. As noted earlier, respondents accrue a variety of impressions that they use to formulate an image of what an ideal reader is. This prototype becomes internalized by the reader who uses this measure, this ideal, for self-assessment. The beliefs or



myths that constitute this ideal are sometimes outgrown and replaced by new insights and revelations. Throughout the interviewing sessions, respondents made statements that illustrated two major internalized beliefs/myths about the processes of reading. The dual term "beliefs/myths" is used deliberately because oftentimes the ideas are traditional, time-honored notions rather than proven facts.

Belief/Myth No. 1. A good reader reads well orally. Respondents were extremely concerned with the role of production in reading and comprehending, and how these tasks must be performed to be done well. For a number of the subjects, oral production was a primary interest. Many of their impressions came from the values that they say teachers put on being able to read well orally. Peers who excelled in this area were often envied, and failure at or difficulty with the performing of the task was anxiety-producing and often embarrassing. Teachers and peers reinforced the notion that reading with letter-perfect pronunciation was the ideal.

I had difficulty reading in front of other people. And when I did get called on to read, I'd start off reading--I read slowly. I read every word exactly the way I thought I was supposed to read. I looked at every word and I read it. . . . And when they had me read a paragraph . . . I'd start to read it and I'd get like two sentences out of the whole paragraph and right away the teacher'd switch to someone else--call on someone else to read. 'Someone continue where Anne left off.' And maybe out of the whole year I read twice in a class out loud. And everybody else got to read all the time. And the ones who were good readers read constantly. (Anne, I, p. 1)

One time there was a girl, she was an "A" student, considered the very best and (laughs) and she stood up and read. And then the teacher would say, 'Who thinks they can do better, as well as, I don't recall her name.' And I pronounced just so, and I read slowly and I pronounced everything as well as she did. (Eva, I, p. 9)

Reading out loud. That's where my deficiency was and I had to prove to them I was going to do it and nothing they did to me was going to stop me from reading. . . . I went through the whole fifth grade reading book not knowing what a story was because we read almost every story and I just had to prepare for the paragraph that was coming up to me. And I didn't understand many stories, still don't know many of the stories. . . . I had to prove myself so that I had to read ahead. So I lost the meaning of stories. I didn't get anything out of the stories because I had to prepare for the next paragraph and read it out loud. (Craig, I, pp. 8-9)

Having to read out loud. You get nervous. Even when you read out loud in the class now, you know, you like to sound good. I remember I wasn't the best reader in my class. There's people that were. I was adequate though. There's people that were better than I was at reading. . . . Sometimes I'd come to words that I didn't know-- that I couldn't pronounce. I kind of recognized words that would slow my reading. I'd be more choppy than someone else. That's how I kind of figured out who was good. Whoever could go through it and just say it. That's how I thought who was better than I was. (George, I, p. 3)

Till I was like in seventh grade I couldn't read orally. It would bother me. . . . I just couldn't read in front of a group of people. Like if they told me to read a paper, I just couldn't do. . . . Sometimes I thought it was because I couldn't read as well as everyone else. I used to read slow (pause), every - word - like - it - is. (laughs) (Christine, I, p. 4)

Belief/Myth No. 2. A good reader reads and comprehends quickly. The obsession with reading quickly and comprehending more seems to be a national one as is evidenced by the number of speed reading courses available on today's market. It was also evident among the respondents in this study that the desire for speed and more comprehension was

paramount. One respondent, cited earlier, felt the pressure for speed came from teacher expectations. Other respondents were motivated and, in some instances, intimidated by the performance of peers. Still others' anxieties were self-imposed.

When someone older than me or younger than me would be reading the same article, shoulder--over the shoulder-- (I could see) that I would be halfway through and they would be all done. It's this type of thing that frustrates me--that's my hang-up. The other hang-up is the way I interpret what I'm reading. I like to know that I can understand what I'm reading. You see, I have to go back and read three times, and I don't like that. I think once is enough. (Nora, I, p. 14)

The reason I took this course is I don't comprehend fast enough. I would like to be able to read faster. It takes me forever to finish a book. . . . I think it's about time that I speed up. I'd like to cover more material and comprehend it. (Eva, I, p. 12)

(Interviewer: What does a good reader do that you don't feel that you do?)

Speed. The speed in which one reads. I read pitifully slow. At least, I think its pitifully slow. And I just can't read fast. So I read slow. And I get yelled at. (Craig, I, p. 13)

When it came to reading, I was terrible. I was always slow when it came to reading stories. And there was this one time I was reading a story, the teacher noticed, I guess, that I--the way I was flipping pages and so forth-- that I wasn't keeping up with the other kids. He brought me aside and said, 'What's wrong? Why can't you read it as fast as everyone else? Don't look at every other word.' And I didn't understand. And I went through a whole crying bit and so on, and he kept telling me you've got, you have to learn to read faster to keep up with the other kids if you want to stay in the high reading group. . . . As it came out, I improved my reading myself. I got to read much faster, but now I can't comprehend. Now that's my problem. I can't comprehend what I read.

\* \* \* \* \*

We'd be reading silently. When we read together (i.e., out loud), I could follow along. But when we read-- anytime they said read silently, it always scared me,

because everybody else always read real quick. They could retain it. But me--I would read very slow. I'd try to get every word into my head, but I still couldn't. (Anne, I, pp. 1-2)

I kind of just decided that being able to read fast was being able to be a good reader. But that's not really true. You have to be able to read fast and understand what it is. (George, I, p. 14)

A good reader probably wouldn't have to write down certain things, you know. They probably would read faster and understand it more. (Leslie, I, p. 11)

(Interviewer: In what way would you want to do better (as a reader)?

Probably not only in speed, but probably comprehension. (Bob, I, p. 23)

Of all the respondents who mentioned speed as a priority, Bob is possibly the only one who might have a legitimate concern. Bob has previously described himself as a slow reader, not only in having difficulty comprehending what he read but also in the arduous, painstaking process of decoding. He goes on to explain why he is concerned with speeding up--a concern which this author feels is different from the ones voiced by the other respondents:

I think you need a little speed in order to keep up with the story. I mean, if you're going to be reading and you have a slow pace, by the time you get to the end of the page, you're going to forget what was read. I think since I've gained some speed that I've gained some comprehension. And I'm not reading at a low, low pace where I forget what I'm reading. (Bob, I, p. 23)

Respondents' definitions of reading. Respondents were asked to define reading in an attempt to see how their definitions related to the ways in which they approached reading and also to allow them to verbalize



what it was they thought they were doing when they read. It was interesting to note how the different respondents formulated their answers. Some strained with creating a dictionary pattern, molding their words into something that one might find in Webster's. Others simply offered very subjective personal definitions. It is also of interest that the request to define reading usually came near the end of the first interview. Respondents had spent a good deal of time already discussing their reading behaviors in very personal terms. The question, "How would you define reading?" from many of the readers, elicited an unspoken "Reading for me is . . . ." Spradley (1979) has suggested that rather than ask what does it mean (i.e., define this) that interviewers should ask how is it used. For this particular question, the participants chose the mode for their responses. Thus, the definitions can be categorized by two basic types: comprehension-based (how is it used) or production-based (what it is). Some definitions contained elements of both types. In those cases, type was determined by which category the respondent gave priority.

#### Comprehension-based responses.

Well (pause) to (pause) enjoy life more and just to understand more about life, I think you need to read and reading is just for me, along with speech and observing visually, is the means to understanding. . . . What reading is is difficult to say . . . but I think it's something good. (Peggy, I, p. 13)

How do I define reading? Learning. I'm learning something. I'm always going to learn. Is that what it is? (Nora, I, p. 15)

(pause) Reading (pause), reading is pleasure. . . . There are certain books, when you read them they give you insight into different cultures. Maybe this isn't pleasure, but



you can put yourself into the girl's place, maybe that gets married in the Jewish family, how she must feel. Or a mother that just is having a baby or losing a child or whatever. You can live someone else's life. I guess. (Eva, I, p. 14)

I like it if I understand what it was all about. But if I don't understand, I don't like it. (pause) Reading is good for you. I think it'll give you more brains. (Marie, I, p. 18)

(Reading is) reading something and comprehending. I don't know. That's what I feel I should be doing better. (Christine, I, p. 14)

How would I define reading? Well, now, I would define reading mostly for pleasure for me and also for information. (Delores, I, p. 12)

#### Production-based definitions.

Reading. (long pause) A form of speech with words? Does that make sense? . . . I don't know how I would explain reading. I really don't know . . . when you read the words--oh--it has something to do with the words, looking at the words. I can't really define it. (Anne, I, p. 11)

Define reading. By definition would be (being) able to comprehend the different words. (Bob, I, p. 23)

I really think I associate reading by the amount--not the quality, just the quantity. I'm not kidding you, that's the way I look at it. A person is a big reader if every week he has a different book. I really think that's the way I equate it. (Craig, I, p. 12)

Reading is a, the pronunciation of letters, which are words, which join sentences, which gives information, pleasure information, etc. (George, I, p. 12)

Summary. Myths about and definitions of reading related by the respondents denoted a preoccupation with performance and production. Fluency in oral reading and speed were cited repeatedly as desirable goals. Respondents categorized reading by two types:

comprehension-based and production-based. Some exhibited conflict around which basis was more important.

### Summary of Pattern Data

The sample revealed a number of dominant patterns in their interviews. Many recalled pre-school reading activity and the accessibility of reading material in their homes. Parents' predisposition to education impacted in a variety of ways on how the respondents viewed their reading and general educational experiences. Once in school, the opinions of peers and teachers were added to the circle of influence. Basal materials and phonics instruction were readily recalled by readers as a major part of their reading instruction.

Interviewees also expressed two beliefs that they held about reading: (1) a good reader reads fluently, and (2) a good reader reads and comprehends quickly. The sample exhibited an internalized acceptance of this image of the ideal reader and often compared their own reading abilities with this ideal.

Lastly, readers tended to define reading by two basic types: comprehension-based or production-based. Comprehension-based definitions emphasized pleasure and/or understanding what was read as criteria. Production-based definitions stressed pronunciation, understanding words and reading large quantities.

### Summary of Results

Interview and survey data supported the researcher's assumption that participants' concept of self as readers could be improved. Attitude of the classroom instructor was cited by the respondents as the most important variable in this change. The interview and survey data further confirmed that readers could improve their concepts of the reading process, as the sample did move from more product-oriented to more process-oriented views of reading. Many of the participants noted that reading Frank Smith's Reading Without Nonsense contributed to the changes in reading views as well as classroom instruction.

The sample exhibited an adequate ability to process syntactic information pre- and post-, and an increased ability to handle semantic information. Comprehension loss decreased significantly. Comprehending measures, the retelling and Reading Placement Test scores, did not support the positive results of the miscue data. Table 1 summarizes the statistical data.

A number of important factors emerged from the interview data, including information about formal and informal instructional practices; the influence of parents, teachers and peers; beliefs about reading; and definitions of reading.

Chapter V will summarize the study, discuss the results, offer recommendations for future research and draw some conclusions about the educational implications of the findings.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### Summary of the Study

This study was concerned with selected community college readers' perceptions of reading and of themselves as readers, and with the relationship of those perceptions to reading ability. It also sought to examine the effects that process-oriented reading instruction had upon those perceptions. Fifteen students in a "Reading Efficiency" class were the subjects for the study. The students took a reading placement test, responded to an attitude survey regarding reading process and reading self-concept, and orally read two essays taken from Time magazine. In addition, twelve of the fifteen volunteered for two in-depth interviews. Pre- and post-assessment of the reading placement test, the attitude survey and the oral readings were performed. The t-test of significance was used to analyze the data. A content analysis highlighting major emergent themes of both interviews was conducted.

The definition of reading used in the study was informed by the theoretical positions of Kenneth Goodman and Frank Smith. They explain the reading process as a psycholinguistically-based interaction between writer and reader. A tool that has developed out of psycholinguistic research is miscue analysis, which examines natural reading phenomena. The oral reading miscues of subjects in this study were analyzed according to the Reading Miscue Inventory (RMI) by Y. Goodman and Burke (1972). The focus of analysis was on students' ability to process semantic as

well as syntactic information and on total comprehension loss. A retelling score for each passage was also calculated.

The specific purposes of this study were to (1) explore selected community college readers' perceptions of reading and themselves as readers; and (2) examine the effect reading instruction and self-concept enhancement have on reading gains among community college students. The researcher posed the following questions:

- Will a reading process orientation to reading instruction improve attitudes about concept of self as reader?
- Will a reading process orientation to reading instruction improve attitudes about concept of the reading process?
- Will a reading process orientation to reading instruction improve syntactic and semantic processing abilities of readers?
- Will a reading process orientation to reading instruction improve readers' scores on the reading placement test?
- What are the major patterns concerning reading that evolve from participants' discussions of themselves as readers and of the reading process?



### Discussion of Results

Concepts of self as reader. The results of the t-test performed on the survey data showed significant improvement in participants' attitudes about themselves as readers ( $p=.005$ ). This significance was clearly supported by the interview data, which showed a positive trend toward improved self-concept. Participants accredited changes in their attitudes to classroom instruction and positive interaction with the classroom teacher. Attempts to expand the students' awareness of their abilities and to enhance their self-concepts through reflection and recognition of their abilities did not prove to have a significant impact. During the interviews, most readers expressed embarrassment with the self-concept exercise. Only a small minority (two out of twelve) mentioned that the exercises had a positive effect on their self-concepts. Many students felt that it was immodest to tout one's abilities, even to themselves.

In their interviews, students expressed a feeling of empowerment from the process-oriented reading instruction. Rather than focusing on their inabilities to perform tasks, they related a sense of control as they interacted with reading tasks. They felt confident that they could search out and understand the important details of a particular text.

Concepts of the reading process. T-test results on the Adult Reading Survey proved to be significant at the .05 level. Students moved from a more product-oriented understanding of reading to one that was more

process-oriented. Classroom instruction which emphasized process aspects of reading and reading Frank Smith's Reading Without Nonsense were prominently noted in participants' comments about the reading process. Participants felt that both instruction and Smith's work had informed or enlightened them about reading in ways that they had not previously considered. In the second interview, participants indicated more readily that they felt they had changed the way they felt about their ability as readers than about the reading process. It is possible that the feeling that one's ability as a reader has changed is a more concrete perception to express than changes in perception of the process. Participants frequently cited being less word-oriented--not having to know exact pronunciations and definitions--and being more globally meaning-oriented as examples of how their reading had changed.

Syntactic and semantic processing. The t-test of the syntactic appropriateness of miscues did not prove significant at the .05 level. Miscues for the students in this sample were syntactically acceptable about 85 percent of the time (pre- and post-). The t-test for significance for semantic appropriateness of miscues, however, did prove to be significant at the .05 level.

The students in this sample, unlike those cited by Raisner (1978) and Goodman and Burke (1973), demonstrated a strong sense of syntactic acceptability that was consistent over their reading of the two passages. The sample showed an increased ability to integrate syntactic and semantic cues. This was also confirmed by their pattern for total

comprehension loss, which was reduced from 60 percent to 48.6 percent (significant at the .05 level).

The retelling scores, a comprehending measure not a process one, indicated a decreased ability of readers to relate the major ideas presented in the essays. The researcher feels this decreased ability may be more of a function of the reading passages themselves than an actual reduction of the readers' abilities. Though the passages were controlled for length and readability, the "idea units" in the first essay appeared to be less complex and more easily retold than the second essay.

Reading Placement Test. T-tests of the pre- and post-scores on the Reading Placement Test proved not to be significant at the .05 level. They did indicate, however, a positive trend. This trend may or may not have been attributable to reading instruction. Because standardized tests tend to rely on correctly identifying the "one best answer," it is difficult to assess to what extent a student may completely or partially comprehend. The choice of a wrong answer for a correct reasoning or comprehending strategy (or vice versa) is always a possibility.

Major themes from interview data. A number of important patterns emerged in the participants' discussions of their reading experiences:

- The majority of students recalled some preschool reading interaction with significant others (either one or both parents, older siblings or peers).

- For this sample, the mother was the dominant reader role model.
- Home environment and availability of materials, combined with parental encouragement to read, had a major impact on the perceptions respondents had about their preschool and early school experiences.
- For students twenty-five or older, economics was a determining factor as to whether or not the student remained in secondary school or sought additional education after high school.
- All except one of the students had used basal materials in early reading instruction.
- The majority of students had also received phonics instruction.
- Many of the subjects were grouped in elementary school by ability, several by need, none by interests.
- Peer influence was a strong factor in students' perception of themselves as readers. All measured their abilities in comparison to those around them.
- Less prominently noted was influence of parents, which in general was positive, and influence of teachers, which in general was negative.
- For this sample, self-concept was more influenced by the interest and concern of the classroom

instructor than the self-concept exercise.

These findings add richness to the data presented earlier. The patterns emphasize a number of areas to which parents and teachers might particularly attend. Early stimulation and encouragement for reading in the home appears to positively affect reading attitudes as respondents in this study recalled deriving much pleasure from such activities. Mothers, because of their traditional roles in families, play a particularly important part in the development of healthy attitudes toward reading. It may be safe to assume that informal home instruction more closely resembles a process-oriented instruction than much of primary school instruction. This may be the child's first and, perhaps, only chance to learn that reading is supposed to convey an integrated, meaningful message and not just linearly combine "letters, which are words, which join sentences, which gives information."

The study correctly assumed that the primary modes of instruction experienced by the sample were not process-oriented. The use of basal materials and phonics instruction predominated. For these students, such instruction had failed to meet their reading needs. Many students felt ill-equipped to comprehend what they read and expressed an inability to know where to begin to search for information. Once past the production and performance of many school tasks, their taught strategies left them with only pieces of the information and no recourse for completing the total picture.

Of particular interest to this researcher is the internalization of the image of the "good" and "ideal" reader. Just as the negative



effects of racism and sexism are internalized by its victims, so, too, are readers victims of the myths of what constitutes proficiency in the task of reading. And just as society at-large is the culprit in perpetuating racist and sexist attitudes, "sub-societies" of teachers, peers, parents and media images perpetuate "proficiency stereotypes" in what they teach, value and model. Purkey (1970) has suggested that the development of self-concept is based more on the views that significant others hold of an individual than upon that individual's success or failure at a certain task. Concept of self as reader appears to develop in much the same ways as global self-concept. Readers depend on significant others to help them develop beliefs and attitudes about the self as reader. The more rigid and absolute the views of others are, the more difficult it is to measure up to the "ideal." It is little wonder that even proficient readers find it difficult to say "I am a good reader."

### Recommendations

This study raises questions and provides a basis for further research on adult readers. The following recommendations are made:

- The area of adult reading research, as cited earlier, pales in comparison to the number of studies done with children. This study addresses a very small minority of the adult reading population. The need to conduct additional research for both proficient and non-proficient readers is crucial. This researcher advocates additional qualitative research in this area,

especially through interviewing. This study illustrates the usefulness of metalinguistic and metacognitive information available from adults. The ability of adults in this study to objectify their reading experiences proved to be an insightful and valuable contribution.

- The relationship between self-concept enhancement and reading ability is not a clearly defined one, but studies in this area continue to point to the importance of the two variables as they impact on one another. The researcher suggests continued inquiry into this area.
- Long-term effects of reading instruction are not investigated in this study. The researcher proposes a longitudinal study that would follow-up the changes reported by the subjects.
- The researcher, also, recommends a controlled study that would compare the effects of process versus non-process-oriented instruction. Such a study could provide useful information about the relationship of the two types of instruction to adults' ability to comprehend, as well as to their perceptions of reading.

#### Educational Implications

Reading instruction in most secondary and post-secondary institutions has traditionally been based on a skills approach. Deficiencies

are "diagnosed" through standardized tests, and the "prescription" meted out, invariably, is practice and drills with the identified problems. Many elementary remedial practices follow this same course. Reading, for many students, becomes a mass of puzzle pieces. The reader may learn to fit parts of the pieces together but seldom gets to see the total picture. The overview, the total picture, is rarely aimed for in instruction or remediation.

Though the sample for this study was small, and generalizations must remain specific to it, it is possible that this sample is, indeed, representative of a larger group of students whose educational experiences are similar. This sample's instructional history with basal materials and phonics instruction typifies reading instruction throughout the United States. The students in this study adopted superficial criteria for successful reading behavior based on what they perceived to be valued in non-process reading models. It is probable that many other readers share this view. Those who fail to learn the tasks of such models are rarely offered alternatives. Because remediation techniques are often more of the same, readers never get beyond struggling to put the puzzle together. In addition to losing sight of any cohesion in the reading process, students who do poorly are frequently placed in ability groups which further emphasize their inabilities, increase their sense of failure and damage their self-concept. Given that students cannot understand what is going on in school, it is no wonder that they are easily bored and frustrated. When family environment offers no recourse or presents a new set of frustrations, problems

can only be compounded. These problems are limited to the individuals in this study, but are symptomatic of a much larger audience. Thus, the following educational implications can have impact and broader significance beyond this sample.

The research findings supported the assumptions that an adult student's concept of self as reader can be enhanced and that his or her attitude toward reading can move from a product-orientation to a process-orientation. In addition, the findings suggest that instruction and the attitude of the classroom teacher are instrumental in fostering better self-concepts and in changing attitudes about the nature of the reading process. Basing instruction on understanding the author's message and searching for meaning proved to be empowering experiences for the participants in this study. Rather than focusing on their inability to pronounce and/or know the meaning of every word, participants gained a new confidence in their ability to search for and interpret information.

Self-concept intervention, as evidenced by the instructor's encouragement and concern, can succeed; and it may be related to academic achievement. Better reading self-concept encourages more reading risk-taking, which in turn may increase reading ability through practice and more exposure to reading materials.

The findings also support the theories of Brookover (1965) and Quandt (1972) concerning the influence of significant others in shaping concept as reader. Parents and teachers especially need to be made aware of their roles in the development of reader self-concept. Though

this study suggests that peers have the most profound influence on readers' notions about the ideal reader, parents and teachers can be instrumental in conveying the existence of other viable and less product-perfect reading models.

The patterns confirmed the researcher's assumption that these students had not received prior instruction that had equipped them to handle reading as an integrated process. Consequently, they never developed any strategies to help them cope with being unable to "read everything quickly and absorb it immediately." Teachers, rather than counteracting students' feelings of incompetence, reinforced their doubts, as they appeared to be intimidating and inconsiderate authority figures. For the unsuccessful student, the perceived barriers between student and teacher stifled any request for help.

It would be unconstructive to criticize teachers for using ineffective instructional strategies, for being uncaring or for giving up on students who do not excel. While these are legitimate concerns, only part of the blame can be placed on teachers. Educational changes are usually implemented very slowly. Communities and school systems that are resistant to change are effective in blocking innovation. Government cutbacks threaten existing programs. Low teaching salaries discourage even the most dedicated teachers. Teachers who want change may conclude that the rewards for change are not worth the efforts. Mindful of these caveats, however, the researcher does advocate change, especially on the part of teachers. The findings from this study support the need for changes in reading instruction. The findings also



underscore the need for teachers to foster positive self-concepts in their students. Teachers need to be reminded that students learn not only what is explicitly taught, but what is implicitly conveyed by their actions and values.

Another educational implication to consider is the reexamination of standardized tests as the sole measure of reading efficiency. The use of a more qualitative measure, perhaps, in conjunction with a standardized test, may be more representative and/or more predictive of actual reading capabilities.

Given the limited amount of time most college teachers have to work with any one particular student, it is conceivable that instructors question their impact and effectiveness. This study supports the theory that teachers can effect positive changes in students' attitudes about themselves and about their reading even within limited time constraints. Teachers may find renewed hope in the evidence from this study. Additionally, they may find that the adoption of more qualitative, process-oriented methodologies is more suited to their students' needs.

Finally, implications can be found in the use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. There is much debate surrounding the issues of "hard data" versus "soft data," scientific investigations versus naturalistic inquiry. While this study does not attempt to resolve the controversy, it does support the usefulness of combining the two methodologies. In this study, each methodology had a unique contribution to make toward broadening the scope and reliability of the data.

### Concluding Comment

The need for viable solutions to the problems of non-proficient adult readers is a crucial one. At a time when advanced technology, with its new terminology, threatens to make illiterates of even the most imminent scholars, it is important to produce readers who, at the very least, are equipped to cope with reading in their daily lives. That some children will fail to read adequately and carry those deficiencies into adulthood is an unfortunate reality. Educators cannot hope to broaden the content or context of adult literacy skills by employing methods with which they have failed previously. The search for alternative methods that address their adulthood and builds on the competencies they already possess is critical.

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## APPENDICES



APPENDIX A  
SUMMARY TABLE OF RAW SCORES

TABLE 2  
SUMMARY TABLE OF RAW SCORES

	RSC		RP		CL		RT		SYN		SEM		RPT	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Keith	28	30	15	21	**	72	75	55	**	76	**	24	19	25
Eva	31	35	26	24	56	44	75	60	92	80	48	56	30	28
Delores	31	32	19	21	**	**	34	51	**	**	**	**	25	24
Peggy	27	36	21	21	**	**	100	72	**	**	**	**	33	33
Patricia	25	23	20	21	52	**	20	45	84	**	40	**	25	21
George	24	28	22	21	52	44	70	53	76	82	40	44	23	28
Craig	29	33	24	22	12	20	85	65	100	96	72	64	31	33
Nora	21	24	11	14	52	48	50	45	88	84	44	52	22	13*
Christine	23	27	17	20	76	72	45	41	30	60	32	28	17	24
Lawrence	28	28	15	17	68	72	35	28	92	92	36	36	13	11
Leslie	34	36	17	19	60	44	53	47	80	96	36	40	14	19
Anne	21	33	19	18	**	40	32	53	**	80	**	38	16	22
Jan	26	21	16	24	88	60	49	47	72	96	76	24	14	21
Bob	23	30	11	27	60	24	48	68	80	92	48	64	19	18
Marie	22	25	19	19	76	58	50	12	92	80	20	42	17	15

RSC = Reading Self-Concept  
 RP = Reading Process  
 CL = Comprehension Loss  
 RT = Retelling

SYN = Syntactic  
 SEM = Semantic  
 RPT = Reading Placement Test

\* Did not complete exam  
 \*\* Less than 25 Miscues

APPENDIX B  
PROFILES OF REMAINING INTERVIEWEES

## PROFILES OF REMAINING INTERVIEWEES

Christine

Christine is an eighteen-year-old recent high school graduate who planned to attend a small junior college in the fall. Christine investigated course offerings at the college on the recommendations of a neighbor and chose the "Reading Efficiency" course because she thought that it would help her handle college materials better. Christine felt that she had problems comprehending material that stemmed from her experiences as a third grader. The class became an experimental one in which students worked on their own with little direct instruction from the classroom teacher. The experience was a bad one for her because she felt that she was too young and not task-oriented enough to learn on her own. She felt that she missed essential reading instruction during that period which in later grades led to her needing remedial reading assistance. Christine disliked reading, feeling that she was not very interested by the reading material and that she remembered very little of it. Christine felt that she had been helped by the "Reading Efficiency" class because she could now comprehend better. She also said that she liked to read better now than before taking the class.

Marie

Marie is a seventeen-year-old recent high school graduate and an avid sports fan. She planned to enter the community college in the

fall and signed up for the "Reading Efficiency" class on the recommendation of the college. Marie described herself as a fast reader with comprehension and concentration problems ("nothing sinks in"). In earlier grades, she always completed reading assignments before her classmates but was never too successful at answering the comprehension questions correctly. Her consuming interest as a reader lay in the area of sports. Because there were very rarely any sports stories in the materials she had for school, she was never interested in things she was required to read. Marie is a very shy and sensitive person. She laughed nervously throughout the entire first interview; and of all the interviewees, she seemed the least able to forget the presence of the tape recorder. In the second interview, Marie opened up a little and revealed the source of her sensitivity. Both of her parents are deaf, and as a child, she often had to cope with other people making fun of their handicap. As a result, she developed the tendency to retreat and to talk as little as possible herself. (Marie rarely participated in classroom discussions.) Marie was not sure if the course had helped her, but she did note that she was doing more reading and that she liked reading a little better by the end of the course.

### Peggy

At age forty-four, Peggy had been away from a structured learning environment for over twenty-five years, since her graduation from high school. Peggy possessed an understated self-confidence. She described her early learning experiences as pleasant, though she recalled attending nine different schools in three different states. The family moved



often because of her father's work. Peggy's avidness for reading as a child carried over into her teen and adult life. She often shared reading materials with her husband and her co-workers.

At a crisis point in her life, when her daughter became heavily involved with drugs, Peggy used reading as bibliotherapy. She collected and read all the materials she could about the subject. She felt the more knowledgeable she was, the more ammunition she could bring to arguments and discussions with her daughter. She felt that some progress had been made, and that being informed had been conducive to that. Peggy enjoyed the class very much and, though she expressed a modest confidence in her reading ability, she notes that there is always room for improvement and plans to work to that end.

### George

George is another recent high school graduate. He is eighteen-years-old and plans to attend a different community college in the fall. He will continue working full-time as a maintenance worker in a cemetery. George enrolled in the "Reading Efficiency" class because he thought that it would help him prepare for college work. George recalled few problems with reading instruction as a child but did admit that oral reading was anxiety-producing for him because he was concerned with "sounding good." George described himself as an average student and an average reader. He, too, thought that he could improve, and in order to do this, he needed to read more. He felt that he did not read enough to be truly confident about it. George had once felt that being able

to read fast was a prerequisite to being a good reader but later decided that one needs to be able to understand it as well.

### Delores

A forty-five year-old emergency-room nurse, Delores was the most emotionally draining interviewee to talk to. She cried through most of the first interview as she recalled painful memories of her early learning experiences. She recounted very little of actual reading experiences explaining that she tried to block out all of it because it was generally an unsuccessful experience for her. It was not until she was thirty, with the encouragement of her father-in-law, that she realized that she was an intelligent human being. Her practical nursing training was a very positive educational experience for her. She enrolled in the "Reading Efficiency" course because the subject interested her. She was considering returning to school for her R.N. diploma and felt that this course would help her cope with other courses in the future.

Delores was the only interviewee who verbally and openly admitted that she thought that she was a pretty good reader. She felt that she understood what she read. She hoped to be able to understand more of what she read by the end of the course. She described her early married reading interests as being confined to magazines and the local newspapers, "who died, who got married, who had a baby." Though her interests had expanded considerably since that time, she hoped this course would motivate her to read things that she was not really interested in so that she could learn from them. To Delores, being a reader meant

that she was "learning all the time, which I like to do."

### Anne

Anne is an eighteen-year-old recent high school graduate who planned to enter the college in the fall as an Art major. She enrolled in the "Reading Efficiency" course on the recommendation of the college. A mature young woman who seemed older than her eighteen years, Anne was eager to talk about some of the concerns she had harbored about her reading. She recalled being a good student in all of her grade school subjects, except reading, and was amazed that she somehow managed to stay in the "high reading group." She felt she had problems that were obvious to her and wondered how the teachers never detected them. Anne felt that she lagged behind her peers in speed and comprehension. She was embarrassed by her oral reading ability and never volunteered to read orally for fear that she would be laughed at and called stupid. In later years, she practiced on her own and forced herself to be a more fluid and pronunciation-conscious reader. She sacrificed comprehension as a result of her attention to these areas. Though she tries to retain what she reads, she has difficulties doing so. (At the end of her first miscue, Anne could recall very little of what was in the essay, though her oral reading was very good.) According to Anne, the course did help her a "little bit" to become the kind of good reader she wanted to be. She felt that one of the most important things she had learned was how to take notes and that this had helped to increase her understanding of written material.

APPENDIX C  
ADULT READING SURVEY

ADULT READING SURVEY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Please respond to the following opinion statements. Rate on a scale of 1 to 5 the response that most closely describes your feelings about reading. There are no right or wrong answers. Your honest opinion is asked. [1 (SA)--"Strongly Agree"; 2 (A)--"Agree"; 3 (NAD)--"Neither Agree Nor Disagree"; 4 (D)--"Disagree"; 5 (SD)--"Strongly Disagree"]

	SA	A	NAD	D	SD
1. A good reader knows the meaning of every word.	1	2	3	4	5
2. A good reader tries to pronounce every word.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I usually try to sound out words I don't know.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am able to understand most of what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel that I am a good reader.	1	2	3	4	5
6. A good reader reads well orally.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Understanding what is read is the most important part of reading.	1	2	3	4	5
8. When I come to something I don't understand while reading, I usually stop reading.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I would feel better about myself if I could read better.	1	2	3	4	5
10. A good reader must be able to pronounce a word in order to understand it.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Often I can figure out something I don't understand by continuing to read.	1	2	3	4	5
12. It is easy for me to understand materials that are interesting.	1	2	3	4	5
13. It is easy for me to remember information from textbooks.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I feel that I am not as smart as people who read well.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I don't think that I will ever be a good reader.	1	2	3	4	5



## APPENDIX D

THE DEFORD THEORETICAL ORIENTATION  
TO READING PROFILE (MODIFIED)

THE DEFORD  
THEORETICAL ORIENTATION TO READING PROFILE  
(MODIFIED)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Read the following statements, and circle one of the responses that will indicate the relationship of the statement to your feelings about reading and reading instruction. SA 2 3 4 SD (select one best answer that reflects the strength of agreement or disagreement)

- |                                                                                                                        | SA |   |   |   | SD |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. A reader needs to be able to verbalize the rules of phonics in order to assure proficiency in processing new words. | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 2. An increase in reading scores is usually related to a decrease in comprehension.                                    | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 3. Dividing words into syllables according to rules is a helpful instructional practice for reading new words.         | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 4. Fluency and expression are necessary components of reading that indicate good comprehension.                        | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 5. When readers do not know a word, they should be instructed to sound out its parts.                                  | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 6. The use of a glossary or dictionary is necessary in determining the meaning and pronunciation of new words.         | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 7. It is a good practice to correct a reader as soon as an oral reading mistake is made.                               | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 8. Paying close attention to punctuation marks is necessary to understand story content.                               | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
| 9. It is a sign of an ineffective reader when words and phrases are repeated.                                          | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |

SA \_\_\_\_\_ SD

- |                                                                                                                                                                         |   |   |   |   |   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. Being able to label words according to grammatical function (nouns, etc.) is useful in proficient reading.                                                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. When coming to a word that's unknown, the reader should be encouraged to guess based upon meaning and go on.                                                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Ability to use accent patterns in multi-syllable words (pho' to graph, pho to' gra phy, and pho to gra' phic) should be developed as a part of reading instruction. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Formal instruction in reading is necessary to insure the adequate development of all the skills used in reading.                                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Phonic analysis is the most important form of analysis used when meeting new words.                                                                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. It is important to teach skills in relation to other skills.                                                                                                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. If a reader says "house" for the written word "home," the response should be left uncorrected.                                                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. It is not necessary to introduce new words before they appear in the reading text.                                                                                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Some problems in reading are caused by reader's dropping the inflectional endings from words (e.g., jumps, jumped).                                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

APPENDIX E  
INTERVIEW GUIDES

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Year: \_\_\_\_\_ Major: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation (if other than full-time student):

\_\_\_\_ part-time \_\_\_\_ full-time \_\_\_\_\_

What's the first thing you remember about learning to read?

- Did you know how to read before you went to school?
- Did your parents or older brothers or sisters read to you?
- Were there a variety of books, magazines or newspapers available in your home?

Did you have problems learning to read as a child?

- What kind?
- How were you helped?
- Can you remember what kind of instruction you received?
- Can you remember any of the books you used? Any of the characters?

How would you define reading?

- Do you read that way when you read newspapers, text-books, magazines, billboards?

Do you feel you're a good reader?

- What would you like to do better as a reader?
- How do you think you need to go about doing that?

How would it benefit you; what advantage would it be to you to read better?



When you're reading and you come to something you don't understand, what do you do? (Or: What do you do when you don't understand something you've read?)

- How do you go about trying to understand what you've read?
- What do you do if you are unable to do this?
- Do you think it is possible to read something, know the meanings and pronunciations of all the words, but still not understand it?
- Do you think it is possible to understand something when you don't know what all the words mean or how to pronounce them?

What kinds of materials do you prefer to read?

- Why do you like those things?
- What kinds of things don't you like to read?
- Why?

Do you feel you read a lot? A little? Do you enjoy reading? What could encourage you to read more?

What do you expect this reading course to help you to do?

INTERVIEW GUIDE--SECOND INTERVIEW

Why did you enroll in this course?

What were your expectations?

Were they met? How/How not?

Have there been any changes in your beliefs (or attitudes) about reading since you've been in the course?

Have there been any changes in your beliefs (or attitudes) about the process of learning to read? The process of learning from reading?

How have you felt about doing the note-taking exercises?

How did you feel about reading Frank Smith?

-- Was reading Smith helpful in your understanding of the reading process?

-- How/How not?

How did you feel about doing the exercises of writing down the statement of what you felt you did well and what you were doing well in your reading?

-- What was this experience like for you? Did you have difficulties with it?

-- What kinds of things did you write?

Has taking this class changed the way you feel about your ability as a reader?

Has your reading outside of the class been affected by what you've been doing in class? In what way?

What does being a reader mean to you?

## APPENDIX F

TIME ESSAYS

## Essay

# It's Time to Ban Handguns



By a curiosity of evolution, every human skull harbors a prehistoric vestige: a reptilian brain. This atavism, like a hand grenade cushioned in the more civilized surrounding cortex, is the dark hive where many of mankind's primitive impulses originate. To go partners with that throwback, Americans have carried out of their own history another curiosity that evolution forgot to discard as the country changed from a sparsely populated, underpoliced agrarian society to a modern industrial civilization. That vestige is the gun—most notoriously the handgun, an anachronistic tool still much in use. Since 1963 guns have finished off more Americans (400,000) than World War II did.

After one more handgun made it into American history last week (another nastily poignant little "Saturday night" 22 that lay like an orphan in a Dallas pawnshop until another of those clammy losers took it back to his rented room to dream on), a lot of Americans said to themselves, "Well, maybe *this* will finally persuade them to do something about those damned guns." Nobody would lay a dime on it. The National Rifle Association battered down its hatches for a siege of rough editorial weather, but calculated that the antigun indignation would presently subside, just as it always does. After Kennedy. After King. After Kennedy. After Wallace. After Lennon. After Reagan. After ... the nation will be left twitching and flinching as before to the pops of its 55 million pistols and the highest rate of murder by guns in the world.

The rest of the planet is both appalled and puzzled by the spectacle of a superpower so politically stable and internally violent. Countries like Britain and Japan, which have low murder rates and virtual prohibitions on handguns, are astonished by the over-the-counter ease with which Americans can buy firearms.

Americans themselves are profoundly discouraged by the handguns that seem to breed uncontrollably among them like roaches. For years the majority of them have favored restrictions on handguns. In 1938 a Gallup poll discovered that 84% wanted gun controls. The latest Gallup finds that 62% want stricter laws governing handgun sales. Yet Americans go on buying handguns at the rate of one every 13 seconds. The murder rate keeps rising. It is both a cause and an effect of gun sales. And every few years—or months—some charismatic public character takes a slug from an itinerant mental case caressing a bizarre fantasy in his brain and the sick, secret weight of a pistol in his pocket.

Why do the bloody years keep rolling by without guns becoming subject to the kind of regulation we calmly apply to drugs, cars, boat trailers, CB radios and dogs? The answer is only partly that the National Rifle Association is, by some Senators' estimate, the most effective lobbying organization in Washington and the deadliest at targeting its congressional enemies at election time. The nation now has laws, all right—a patchwork of some 25,000 gun regulations, federal, state and local, that are so scattered and inconsistent as to be preposterously ineffectual.

Firearms have achieved in the U.S. a strange sort of inevitability—the nation's gun-ridden frontier heritage getting smokily mingled now with a terror of accelerating criminal

violence and a sense that as the social contract tatters, the good guys must have their guns to defend themselves against the rising tribes of bad guys. It is very hard to persuade the good guys that all those guns in their hands wind up doing more lethal harm to their own kind than to the animals they fear; that good guys sometimes get drunk and shoot other good guys in a rage, or blow their own heads off (by design or accident) or hit their own children by mistake. Most murders are done on impulse, and handguns are perfectly responsive to the purpose: a blind red rage flashes in the brain and fires a signal through the nerves to the trigger finger—BLAM! Guns do not require much work. You do not have to get your hands bloody, as you would with a knife, or make the strenuous and intimately dangerous effort required to kill with bare hands. The space between gun and victim somehow purifies the relationship—at least for the person at the trigger—and makes it so much easier to perform the deed. The bullet goes invisibly across space to flesh. An essential disconnection, almost an abstraction, is maintained. That's why it is so easy—convenient, really—to kill with one of the things.

The post-assassination sermon, an earnest lamentation about the "sickness of American society," has become a notably fatuous genre that blames everyone and then, after 15 minutes of earnestly empty regret, absolves everyone. It is true that there is a good deal of evil in the American air; television and the sheer repetitiousness of violence have made a

lot of the country morally weary and dull and difficult to shock. Much of the violence, however, results not from the sickness of the society but the stupidity and inadequacy of its laws. The nation needs new laws to put at least some guns out of business. Mandatory additional punishments for anyone using a gun in a crime—the approach that Ronald Reagan favors—would help. But a great deal more is necessary. Because of the mobility of guns, only federal laws can have any effect upon them. Rifles and shotguns—long guns—are not the problem; they make the best weapons for defending the house anyway, and they are hard for criminals to conceal. Most handguns are made to fire at people, not at targets or game. Such guns should be banned. The freedoms of an American individualism bristling with small arms must yield to the larger communal claim to sanity and safety—the "pursuit of happiness."

That would, of course, still leave millions of handguns illegally in circulation; the penalties for possessing such weapons, and especially for using them in crime, would have to be severe. Even at that, it would take years to start cleansing the nation of handguns. Whatever its content, no substantive program for controlling guns probably stands any chance of getting through Congress unless Ronald Reagan supports it. He ought to do so, not because he has been shot in the chest but because it should be done.

The indiscriminate mass consumption of guns has finally come to disgrace Americans abroad and depress them at home. It has been almost 90 years since the historian Frederick Jackson Turner propounded his famous thesis about the end of the American frontier. But the worst part of the frontier never did vanish. Its violence, once tolerable in the vast spaces, has simply backed up into modern America, where it goes on blazing away.

—By Lance Morrow





## Essay

# On Leading the Cheers for No. 1

*The first right on earth is the right of the ego.*  
—Ayn Rand

With her usual authoritarian sweep, Author Ayn Rand strikes a basic blow for her consistent dogma of individualism. Though she is more a cult figure than a popular philosopher, her words mirror an attitude that is becoming more and more common in the U.S., particularly among public figures. Indeed, an increasing number of Americans seem to have concluded that the right to ego implies the duty to exercise it publicly. The result is something of a rout for the time-honored American taboo against tooting one's own horn. Today it is commonplace for Americans to come right out and admit just how wonderful they really are.

Listen to the new surge of self-applause. Television's Howard Cosell ranks himself as a sports commentator: "I really believe I'm the best. My relationship with the men who play the games—all games—is probably unparalleled in this country." Private Citizen Joan Kennedy assesses herself for a *Ladies' Home Journal* interviewer: "I have talent. I know I'm smart. I got straight A's in graduate school. I've still got my looks. I know I've got all these terrific things going for me. I mean, my God, you are talking to, I think, one of the most fascinating women in this country." *Sugar Babies* Star Mickey Rooney makes clear he knows all there is to know about theatrics: "I'm 58 years in the theater. Nobody gives me instructions."

Baseball Player Reggie Jackson speaks of his importance to his sport: "I am the straw that stirs the drink. It all comes back to me." Chrysler Chief Lee Iacocca recalls what happened to him while he was rising in the business world: "I got pretty damn good." Chicago Realty Mogul Evangeline Gouletas awards herself an ovation on the eve of marrying Governor Hugh Carey of New York: "In Chicago, they love me. In Chicago, I am already First Lady." Novelist Gore Vidal confides why the *New York Times* published a favorable review of his new book *Creation*: "They're desperate for me to write for them."

Bleats of unchecked egoism are now so commonplace that self-glorification may be well on the way to becoming standard American style. Yet such an epidemic of flagrant braggadocio would have scandalized the country not long ago. Most Americans have always felt, as many still feel, dutybound to sniff at the ostentatious chest thumper and look down on all public boasting. Brazen self-admiration has never been considered criminal, nor necessarily degenerate, but it has always been judged tacky—poor form, at best. Good form has always required reticence about one's virtues. To think well of oneself was one thing, but, under the traditional rules, it was quite another to give voice to one's privately cultivated self-esteem. Indeed, even if somebody else called attention to one's admirable points, one was supposed to disclaim the praise.

The braggart, of course, has always been present on the American scene, and boasting has been tolerated when it happened to come from certain types—poets, entertainers, politicians—who were considered beyond the pale anyhow. It was all right for Walt Whitman to indulge his flagrant self-

celebration ("I dote on myself, there is that lot of me and all so luscious") because, as a poet, he was lost to gentility anyway. The public similarly has always recognized that in a democracy, where candidates for elective office have to sell themselves like consumer goods, politicians have little practical choice but to depict themselves as heaven's gift to the voter. Still, for most people, self-containment has long been thought a virtue.

The old ideal probably had begun to fade when Norman Mailer published a hodgepodge of fiction and autobiography under the title *Advertisements for Myself*. In any case, windy self-advertisement became more and more popular in the years that followed. Said John Lennon at the peak of the Beatles' popularity: "We're more popular than Jesus Christ now." Said Heavy-

weight Boxer Muhammad Ali, in a typical flight: "It ain't no accident that I'm the greatest man in the world at this time in history." The same period at last produced an intellectual model for publicly saluting the self: *Commentary* Editor Norman Podhoretz's autobiographical book *Making It*. Wrote Podhoretz: "I looked upon those who possessed ... fame, and I liked what I saw; I measured myself against them, and I did not fall short."

The ideal of modesty, though hardly dead, has begun to seem almost quaint. In an age when some observers think the U.S. has entered the "culture of narcissism," in the words of Christopher Lasch's study, many people think that self-effacement is tainted with hypocrisy. Says Economist John Kenneth Galbraith in his new memoir *A Life in Our Times*: "Truth

is not always coordinate with modesty." Perhaps, but then, truth is never coordinate with vanity. Self-praise is inescapably distorted and corrupted at its source, and this—not some arbitrary convention of etiquette—makes the self-praiser always seem at least ridiculous or fraudulent, and often worse. One must return to Reinhold Niebuhr for the key: "Since the self judges itself by its own standards, it finds itself good."

The standard of modesty evolved out of concerns deeper than ephemeral questions of style and etiquette. The discipline of reining in one's tendency to boast is, after all, merely part of the larger discipline of keeping the ego in check. And why should anyone wish to do that? Simply because the main thing that traps people into spiritual emptiness is some sort of berserk ego. Says Psychologist Shirley Sugerman in *Sin and Madness: Studies in Narcissism*: "The ancient wisdom of both East and West [tells] repeatedly of man's tendency to self-idolatry, self-encapsulation, and its result: self-destruction."

Nobody need suppose that a bit of windy conceit is going to add up to self-destruction. Still, everybody knows at heart that boasting usually signals some pathetic private weaknesses. Psychology has never been mystified by braggadocio. Says Associate Director John Schimmel of the William A. White Institute of Psychiatry: "It is a way of denying some form of insecurity." The rule is simple: the louder and more prolonged the bragging, the more profound and painful the secret doubts and distances that are being masked. Given this pattern, the self-glorifier deserves less than applause and more than mockery. Pity is perhaps the appropriate response.

—By Frank Trippen

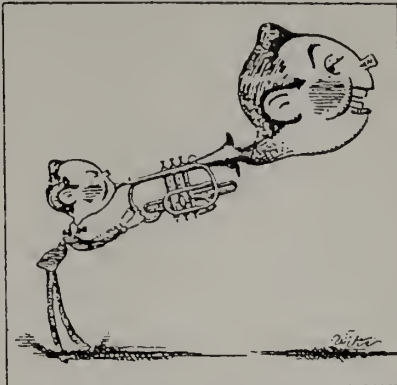


Illustration for TIME by Michael C. Witte





